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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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'90-hr work week stressful'

As a Bengalurean from India's startup capital, where hustle culture is deeply ingrained, my social media feed is abuzz with debates surrounding the concept of a 90-hour workweek.

While some have argued that it paves the way for success, as an educationist, I believe this culture not only harms personal well-being but also stifles opportunities for learning, creativity, and growth: **Mansoor Ali Khan** writes for **Salar News.**

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State to get new irrigation scheme worth Rs 1,274 cr

CHITRADURGA, 23 JAN

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Thursday said a new irrigation scheme worth Rs 1,274 crore is ready for implementation. Speaking at a function after offering 'Bagina' at the Vani Vilas reservoir here, he said the scheme once implemented would ensure water reaches the last acre of farmland in the region. *— PTI*

>>>More on Page 2

200 quarantined in J&K mysterious illness case

RAJOURI/JAMMU, 23 JAN

At least 200 individuals who came in contact with the affected families of the 17 who died due to the mysterious illness in Rajouri, Jammu and Kashmir, have been quarantined as a precautionary measure, an official said. Top health officials have identified a common factor, noting the involvement of the brain and damage to the nervous system. A total of 17 people, including 13 children from the families of Mohammad Fazal, Mohammad Aslam, and Mohammad Rafiq in Baddal village, have died due to a mysterious illness over the past month and a half. *— PTI*

Delhi-based short film 'Anuja' enters Oscar race

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

New Delhi-based short film, 'Anuja,' bagged a nomination in the Live Action Short category at the 97th Academy Awards. 'Anuja,' directed by Adam J Graves and Suchitra Mattai, follows a gifted nine-year-old Anuja, who must make a choice between education and factory work alongside her sister - a decision that will shape both their futures. It stars Sajda Pathan and Ananya Shanbhag. Anuja' was produced by Mindy Kailing with Priyanka Chopra and two-tie Oscar winning producer Guneet Monga serving as executive producers, among others. *— PTI*

Sehwag, wife to separate after 20yrs of marriage

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

Indian cricket legend Virender Sehwag and his wife, Aarti Ahlawat, are reportedly separating after 20 years of marriage. The couple has unfollowed each other on Instagram, fuelling speculation about their relationship status. *— Salar News*

Centre sends notice to Ola, Uber

Salar News was first to report different pricing by Uber and Ola on iOS & Android phones

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) on Thursday issued notices to tech giant Apple Inc and cab aggregators Ola and Uber following consumer complaints about software performance and pricing disparities, Consumer Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi said on Thursday.

On 8 November, 2024, Salar News was the first to report the differential pricing on everyday apps such as Uber and Ola on iOS and Android phones in the article 'Hidden costs of iOS: Apple users paying more for everyday apps'. The issue soon made headlines nationwide.

When Salar News booked a 5km ride in Bengaluru, the fare for an Uber Auto was Rs 154 on an iPhone, compared to just Rs 121 on an Android device for the same trip. Similarly, flight and hotel bookings on apps such as MakeMyTrip and Yatra can cost at least 10 per cent more on iOS than on Android.

Joshi had earlier termed this practice a "prima facie unfair trade practice" and a "blatant disregard" for consumer rights.

The minister stressed the government's "zero tolerance for consumer exploitation" and directed the CCPA to conduct a thorough investigation into the allegations. In October last year, a social media post by an X user, Saurabh Sharma, highlighted similar discrepancies on Flipkart, where the price of the same product — a Mokobara cabin suitcase — was higher on iOS than on Android. "Android vs iOS – different prices on Flipkart app. Same Mokobara cabin suitcase costs Rs 4,119 on Flipkart's android app vs Rs 4,799 on iOS app," Sharma had written, sharing screenshots to back his claim. Meanwhile, commenting on the development, an Uber spokesperson said: "We do not set prices based on a rider's phone manufacturer."

—Salar News

When Salar News booked a 5km ride, the fare for an Uber Auto was Rs 154 on an iPhone, compared to just Rs 121 on Android device *PHOTO: PTI*

SALAR Reported it 1st

Hidden costs of iOS: Apple users paying more on everyday apps

AMINA AFAQ
BENGALURU, 7 NOV

The biggest struggle in purchasing an Apple device is paying a bomb for it. But, that is just the beginning of a journey of sky-high expenses. Using common apps like Uber, Ola, MakeMyTrip, and Yatra can be more expensive on iOS than on Android, leading Apple users to pay extra for everyday services.

Let's consider an instance while hailing a ride on Uber. When Salar News booked a 5-kilometre ride in Bengaluru, the fare for an Uber Auto was Rs 154 on an iPhone, compared to just Rs 121 on an Android device for the same trip. Similarly, flight and hotel bookings on apps such as MakeMyTrip and Yatra can cost at least 10 per cent more on iOS than on Android.

Many Apple users say the company is robbing its customers. "It is unethical," Alia (name changed), a psychologist and iOS user from Bengaluru, told Salar News. "Maybe this is a class thing because iPhones are supposed to be for richer or cooler people. The brand does not justify the higher price."

Apple Tax

So, what's driving this discrepancy? Industry experts point to "Apple Tax" — a 30 per cent commission fee that Apple charges developers for using App Store and in-app payment system. While this tax applies to many transactions on iOS apps on gaming, gambling and OTT platforms, some categories, such as food, physical goods and flight tickets, are reportedly exempted. Apple should not impose higher charges on services such as Uber or Ola either. For subscriptions such as Netflix and YouTube Premium, Apple's commission is unavoidable, leading apps to pass those costs onto consumers.

Subscriptions face a 30 per cent commission fee in the first year, then it is reduced to 15 per cent each year after. Google, by contrast, charges third-party subscription apps a flat 15 per cent commission. Amal Sony, a Pennsylvania-based app developer, said Apple charges developers an annual fee of $99 (Rs 8,350), apart from the commission, for the App Store while Play Store takes $25 (Rs 2,100) for the same. The $99 cost plays a role in the pricing of small developers, he said. Although Apple's guidelines specify that apps should not exploit users, the company has yet to address or take action against apps that appear to be inflating costs on iOS devices. The apps in question and Apple refused to comment on the inflated costs.

—Salar News

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SALAR EXCLUSIVE

NCLAT LIFTS BAN, WHATSAPP CAN NOW SHARE DATA WITH META

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) has granted a stay on a five-year data-sharing ban imposed by the Competition Commission of India (CCI) on Meta, the parent company of WhatsApp. The CCI had ruled that WhatsApp's 2021 privacy policy update unfairly compelled users to agree to widespread data collection and sharing within the Meta group. Meta had challenged the directive, warning that it may have to roll back some features.

The NCLAT has suspended the ban while it hears Meta's appeal, with the next hearing scheduled for 17 March. Meta has welcomed the decision, stating that it will evaluate its next steps. A spokesperson said the company's focus remains on supporting businesses that rely on its platform and providing high-quality experiences for WhatsApp users.

The CCI had imposed a penalty of £2.1m on Meta for abusing its dominant position.

The regulator had also ordered Meta to implement remedial measures, including barring WhatsApp from sharing user data with other Meta companies for advertising purposes. The NCLAT's decision provides a temporary reprieve for Meta, allowing it to continue its current data-sharing practices while the appeal is heard. *—PTI*

ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

Centre stops TN's tungsten mine auction

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

The Indian government has announced the cancellation of the auction for the Nayakkarpatti tungsten mineral block in Tamil Nadu, located near the Arittapatti Biodiversity site and several cultural heritage locations. Tungsten is recognised as a critical and strategic mineral.

The announcement follows a meeting on 22 January with representatives from the local Ambalakarars community, who urged Coal and Mines Minister G Kishan Reddy to cancel the auction. During the discussion, the Minister listened attentively and expressed the Union government's commitment to biodiversity heritage protection.

The Nayakkarpatti block, covering over 20.16 square kilometres, was originally proposed for auction in February last year, with inputs sought from the Tamil Nadu government prior to its listing.

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin had previously urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to stop the awarding of tungsten mining rights in Madurai district, citing local opposition and environmental concerns. *—PTI*

Sanctions hit Russia's oil flow to India

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

The extensive sanctions imposed by the United States on the Russian oil sector are beginning to affect oil supplies to India, with Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) reporting insufficient cargoes for March. The US sanctions, announced on 10 January, target oil producers Gazprom Neft and Surgutneftegas, blacklisting 183 vessels involved in Russian energy exports and imposing restrictions on various oil industry players.

BPCL's Director (Finance), Vetsa Ramakrishna Gupta, indicated that while Russian oil had been booked for January and February, the availability for March was lacking. Consequently, the proportion of Russian oil processed by BPCL is expected to drop from 31 per cent in the previous quarter to 20 per cent in March.

Despite this, Gupta noted that alternatives from the Middle East would be explored to compensate for the shortfall. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, India emerged as the second-largest buyer of Russian crude, with imports averaging 1.7 million barrels per day in 2024.

In light of the US sanctions, India has decided to reject deliveries from sanctioned tankers but will allow existing contracts to complete until a 12 March wind-down period. The sanctions have influenced global oil prices, which Gupta predicts will stabilise between USD 75 and USD 80 per barrel soon. *—PTI*

The US sanctions, announced on 10 January, target oil producers Gazprom Neft and Surgutneftegas *PHOTO: PTI*

M'luru man tests positive for MPox

BENGALURU, 23 JAN

A case of MPox has been reported in State after a 40-year-old man who recently came from Dubai tested positive for the virus, the health officials said on Thursday.

This is the first case of Monkeypox reported in the state this year, they said.

"The case was confirmed on 22 January, 2025 by the National Institute of Virology (NIV), Pune in a 40-year-old male in Magaluru, a native of Karkala (Udupi district)," the health department said. The said patient, who has been residing in Dubai for the past 19 years, arrived in Mangaluru on 17 January, 2025. *—PTI*

PUNJAB COPS TO NOT PROTECT KEJRI

WASHINGTON, 23 JAN

Punjab Police personnel deployed in the security of Aam Aadmi Party national convener Arvind Kejriwal have been withdrawn, the state police chief said on Thursday. "Time to time, we get reports of threats to chief minister Bhagwant Mann and Arvind Kejriwal and we share them with the concerned agencies. "Following the directions of the Delhi police and the Election Commission today, we withdrew the Punjab police in the security of Kejriwal ji," Director General of Police Gaurav Yadav told. *—PTI*

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PHOTO: PTI

Ram Sene vandalises M'luru parlour

MANGALURU, 23 JAN

A group of youths belonging to a fringe outfit Ram Sene vandalised a massage parlour at Bejai, an uptown in Mangaluru, on Thursday, police said.

About a dozen people barged into the massage parlour and started attacking the staff, including women.

They damaged the properties inside the shop and allegedly accused the staff of indulging in 'unethical practices' in the name of a unisex saloon.

Home Minister G Parameshwara, who was in Udupi, the neighbouring district of Dakshina Kannada, condemned the attack and ordered police to investigate the case.

The police have arrested 14 accused.

According to a police statement, based on a complaint filed by the salon owner, Sudheer Shetty, an FIR was registered at the Barke Police Station under various sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita.

Prasad Attavar, leader of Ram Sene said, "We have been informed that unethical activities were promoted there under the guise of unisex saloon. The women were given drugs and pushed into the sex business." *—PTI*

MISSING FOR A WEEK

Ex-jawan from Hyderabad chops up wife's body, boils parts in pressure cooker

HYDERABAD, 23 JAN

A 35-year-old woman is feared to have been murdered by her husband, a former soldier, who allegedly dismembered her body and boiled the parts in a pressure cooker. The husband, Gurumurthy, is currently in police custody while investigators verify his shocking claims.

The woman had been reported missing a week ago, prompting her parents to lodge a complaint with the Meerpet police on 18 January. Gurumurthy, who worked as a security guard, accompanied his in-laws when they filed the report, stating that the couple had argued on January 16, and she had left their home without informing anyone.

Authorities are struggling to locate the woman's remains, as the suspect claims he disposed of the body parts in a lake after boiling them. "Efforts are being made, but the body parts could not be found. It still looks like a missing case," stated a police official. The investigation continues as the police explore various leads regarding the woman's disappearance and the alleged crime.

Residents of New Venkateshwara Colony, where the couple lived, have begun vacating or temporarily moving from their flats due to concerns over the gruesome nature of the incident. Although Gurumurthy is under suspicion, police have not yet recovered any physical evidence linking him definitively to the crime.

Further details are expected to emerge as the investigation unfolds, including potential motives and the circumstances surrounding the dispute that led to the woman's disappearance.

The couple, originally from Prakasam district in Andhra Pradesh, had two children together, adding another layer of tragedy to this unfolding case. *—PTI*

Gurumurthy and Puttavenkata Madhavi *PHOTO: SCREENGRAB*

Cab driver sets self on fire over marital dispute

BENGALURU, 23 JAN

A 39-year-old cab driver tragically took his own life after allegedly setting himself on fire on Thursday, in a suspected case of self-immolation. The incident occurred around 10.30am in Nagarabhavi's NGEF Layout, where the man, identified as Manjunath, resided.

According to the police, the extreme step appears to have been taken following a heated argument with his estranged wife, Nayana. The couple, who were married in 2013, had been facing marital difficulties for several years, prompting them to initiate divorce proceedings in 2022.

Manjunath had recently expressed a desire to reconcile and rebuild their relationship, sources revealed. Around 8am, he visited Nayana's residence in a bid to persuade her to reconsider the divorce, but the discussion escalated into a heated dispute.

Consumed by despair, Manjunath returned to his apartment and doused himself in petrol before setting himself on fire. Neighbours, who witnessed the incident, alerted authorities, but Manjunath suffered fatal injuries. The Jnanabharathi police have registered a case and are investigating the circumstances surrounding the tragedy. *—Salar News*

Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support

Cop probing ATM robbery case falls ill amid pressure

BIDAR, 23 JAN

Ajay Hilori, the Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of the Kalaburagi Zone and leader of the Special Investigation Team (SIT) in the SBI ATM robbery and shootout case, has fallen ill and is currently receiving treatment at a private hospital in the city.

A special team of eight has been assembled under Hilori's direction as he has actively pursued the culprits for the past week. The increased pressure on the government to resolve the case has added to his workload.On Wednesday night, Hilori was admitted to Gudage Super Specialty Hospital due to dizziness and fatigue related to work stress. Medical examinations, including angiography, revealed no serious issues. Doctors believe his condition is a result of excessive travel and exhaustion, and his health has since shown signs of improvement. *—Salar News*

Prohibitory orders imposed around JEE exam centres

BENGALURU, 23 JAN

The district administration on Thursday announced prohibitory orders within 200m vicinity of the Joint Entrance Examination (JEE Main 2025) centres, which is scheduled to take place between 22 to 30 January. The restrictions will be in force between 9am and 6pm outside exam centres.

Bengaluru Police Commissioner B Dayananda ordered all computer centres, cybers and xerox shops within the radius to remain shut on the examination days. The authorities will station magistrates and police officers at examination venues to maintain order. The JEE examinations are being conducted by the National Testing Agency (NTA), a premier testing organisation which conducts entrance examinations for admission and fellowship in higher educational institutions. *—Salar News*

Cops reunite minors missing for 5 days with parents

BENGALURU, 23 JAN

Police have traced and reunited with parents two minor students, who had gone missing for the past five days, officials said on Thursday. Ravi and Praveen, 9th and 7th-grade students, respectively, of MES School, had been living with their grandparents in the city. On 18 January, when the boys failed to return home, their family reported the matter to Tilak Nagar police.

The police formed two teams to track down the missing children. On reviewing CCTV footage, investigators found the boys boarding a bus from Jayanagar 4th Block. Following this lead and intelligence gathered, the police traced the children to Male Mahadeshwara Hills in Hanur Taluk of Chamarajanagar district. The minors were brought back to Bengaluru, where they were provided counselling before they were handed over to parents, police said. An investigation is on to find what prompted the boys to leave home without informing their guardians, police said. *—Salar News*

20-year-old crashes into parked truck, dies

BENGALURU 23 JAN

A 20-year-old motorcyclist tragically lost his life after colliding with a parked container truck in the Chikkajala traffic police station limits late Wednesday night. The victim, identified as Niraj Kumar, was a resident of Harohalli in North Bengaluru and originally hailed from Uttar Pradesh.

According to the traffic police, the truck was parked near Sai Green Park Layout to unload electric poles. However, the driver failed to activate the parking lights, rendering the vehicle nearly invisible in the darkness. The accident occurred around 11.40pm on Gantiganahalli Main Road. Kumar, who was riding his two-wheeler at the time, crashed into the stationary vehicle. *—Salar News*

State to get new irrigation scheme worth Rs 1,274 cr

CM says scheme will ensure water reaches to all farmlands

CHITRADURGA, 23 JAN

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Thursday said a new irrigation scheme worth Rs 1,274 crore is ready for implementation.

Speaking at a function after offering 'Bagina' at the Vani Vilas reservoir here, he said the scheme once implemented would ensure water reaches the last acre of farmland in the region.

Taking a swipe at the BJP, Siddaramaiah said, "Former minister Govinda Karajol made hollow promises about making the Upper Bhadra Project a national project but later betrayed the people."

"Even though Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced Rs 5,300 crore for the project in the Budget, not a single rupee has been released. This is a betrayal of the people by the Central government and BJP," he said.

Sitharaman is a Rajya Sabha member from Karnataka.

He appealed to Sitharaman to fulfill her promise by releasing Rs 5,300 crore for the project.

Claiming that his government delivered what it promised, he alleged that the BJP deceived people. Highlighting the historical importance of the Vanivilasa reservoir, he said it is the first dam built in Karnataka, with a history of 115 years.

CM Siddharamaiah & DyCM DK Shivakumar at the inauguration of the International Trade Fair 2025 on Organic Products and Millets at Palace Grounds in Bengaluru on Thursday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

CM rubbishes allegations of lack of funds

Siddaramaiah rubbished BJP allegations that there were a lack of funds to appoint boards and corporations. "The BJP is making false, politically motivated allegations," Siddaramaiah said.

The statement highlights the allegedly illegal transfer of Rs 87 crore from the funds of the Karnataka State Maharshi Valmiki Scheduled Tribes Development Corporation to various bank accounts and individuals ahead of the Lok Sabha elections. BJP State Chief BY Vijayendra accused the Congress government of misappropriating funds designated for the welfare of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. *—PTI*

Mandya to get agricultural university: CM

BENGALURU, 23 JAN

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said on Thursday that an integrated agricultural university will be established in the agriculture-based Mandya.

The university will offer courses in agriculture, horticulture and animal husbandry and will provide guidance and encouragement to farmers in Mandya, Hassan, Mysuru and Chamarajanagar areas for organic and grain farming, he said.

He was speaking at the inaugural event of the International Trade Fair Organic and Grain 2025 here, which will be on till 25 January.

Siddaramaiah also urged the Union government to implement the MSP (Minimum Support Price), which has been a long-standing demand of farmers.

Recalling that his family, which belongs to an agricultural family, also used to cultivate grains, he said State is number three in the country in grain production. *—PTI*

Janardhana Reddy **PHOTO: FB**

Sriramulu **PHOTO: FB**

More rift in BJP as Janardhana & Sriramulu spar

BENGALURU, 23 JAN

BJP's internal squabbles deepened on Thursday with old pals--mining baron B Janardhana Reddy and ex-minister B Sriramulu locking horns in public.

The trigger seems to be accusations against Sriramulu in the BJP core committee meeting that he was in some way responsible for the party's defeat in the Sandur by-poll, after failing to secure the party nomination for himself. He was pulled up for not doing enough to win the election.

According to sources, a section in the BJP created an impression that Sriramulu was eyeing for a BJP ticket from Sandur after losing the 2023 assembly election and 2024 Lok Sabha poll. However, the party fielded Bangaru Hanumanthu, who lost to Congress' Annapurna in the bypoll.

Following the accusations made in the core committee meeting Sriramulu said he would prefer quitting the party.

The former MP and MLA on Wednesday openly accused Janardhana Reddy, the Gangavathi MLA of "backbiting" against him to party national general secretary and Karnataka in charge Radha Mohan Das Agarwal.

Responding, Reddy sought to remind Sriramulu that it was he who made him tread on the righteous path when he was thinking of avenging his uncle's brutal murder.

He said he has seen media reports that Sriramulu may join Congress to "control some bigwigs".

Reacting to it, Sriramulu charged that Reddy is out to divide the party into two in Ballari.

Meanwhile, BJP national president J P Nadda spoke to Sriramulu over phone, sources close to him said. *—PTI*

BDA seizes ₹120 crore properties in Nagarabhavi

BENGALURU, 23 JAN

As part of its ongoing drive against encroachment, the Bangalore Development Authority (BDA) on Thursday seized property worth around Rs 120 crore in the Malagala area of Nagarabhavi.

Armed with a court order, the BDA cleared encroachment on a two-acre 16-guntha plot (Survey No. 14/2) in Malagala village under the Yeshwanthpur Hobli of Bengaluru North Taluk.

Around 20 sheds, concrete buildings and warehouses illegally constructed on the site were demolished.

The operation was led by BDA Deputy Assistant Commissioner Krishna Kumar, along with West Division Executive Engineer Ravi Kumar and Assistant Executive Engineer Basavareddy.

Local police assisted in maintaining law and order during the eviction drive.

In another operation, the BDA also dismantled around 48 illegally constructed houses in Papareddy Palya, part of Nagarabhavi Phase 2. The land had been the subject of a legal dispute between a civilian and the BDA, and the court ruled in favour of the latter.

Several workers and shop owners protested against the demolition drive, but BDA officials said notices had been issued to them. The authorities have started fencing the area to prevent further encroachment. *—Salar News*

Several workers and shop owners protested against the demolition drive **PHOTO: SALAR**

Ministers to discuss UGC norms on 5 Feb

BENGALURU, 23 JAN

A conclave of the Ministers for Higher Education of all states will be held on 5 February in Bengaluru to discuss the draft UGC Regulations, 2025, Karnataka Minister MC Sudhakar said on Thursday.

In the conclave, Grading of Higher Education Institutions (HEI) based on implementation of National Education Policy 2020 document, will also be discussed, he said.

In a press release, **Sudhakar** said Ministers for Higher Education of all states are being invited to participate in the conclave.

He stated that the UGC draft regulations are a severe setback to the higher education system of the nation.

"It severely curtails the power legitimately held by the states hitherto and restrains the constitutional duties and responsibilities of states in higher education," Sudhakar, who holds the Higher Education portfolio said.

As per new regulations, the authority of appointing the Vice Chancellors and constituting the Search Committee has been given to Chancellors in entirety and state governments are completely excluded from this exercise, stated the press release.

Many states, including Kerala, Tamil Nadu and some NDA partners have already lodged their protest regarding these regulations, said the minister, adding that the conclave is being convened to discuss the pros and cons of the draft regulations and to take a common position. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Gas leak at CNG centre triggers public outcry

MYSURU, 23 JAN

A gas leak from a newly constructed private CNG supply centre in the Kudlur Industrial Area of Kushalnagar has raised serious concerns among local residents. The incident, which took place on Tuesday evening, caused significant unease, particularly affecting children and elderly citizens in the densely populated area.

In response to the gas leak, residents, led by Kudlu Bengaluru Gram Panchayat president Bhaskar Nayak, staged a protest outside the CNG facility on Wednesday, demanding its closure and relocation to a safer site. Kushalnagar tahasildar Kiran Gowraiah arrived at the scene to investigate the leak, which was reportedly caused during a testing process, and gathered testimonies from both CNG staff and protesting residents. Following this, Gowraiah submitted a report to the deputy commissioner. *—Salar News*

Beaten up autorickshaw driver dies in Bengaluru

BENGALURU 23 JAN

A 27-year-old autorickshaw driver, who was assaulted by a group of men in RT Nagar, succumbed to his injuries on Thursday.

The victim, Salman, a resident of Rahmath Nagar, had gotten into a heated argument with a group of men on Wednesday morning, which escalated into a physical altercation. The assailants attacked Salman near RT Nagar main road, inflicting severe injuries before fleeing the scene while some locals attempted to intervene.

Salman was immediately transported to Bowring Hospital, but despite the medical team's efforts, he died on Thursday.

Based on a complaint filed by Salman's family, the police have registered a murder case and are currently searching for the suspects. It is believed that a dispute between the victim and the assailants triggered the fight. *—Salar News*

MILLET FESTIVAL

Students attend International Trade Fair 2025 on Organic Products and Millets at Palace Grounds in Bengaluru on Thursday. The fair is held from 23-25 January **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

HC halts action on FIR against CT Ravi till 30 Jan

BENGALURU, 23 JAN

High Court on Thursday issued an interim order preventing the State from taking any further action until 30 January on the FIR lodged against BJP MLC CT Ravi.

The FIR accuses Ravi of making an allegedly obscene remark against Women and Child Development Minister Laxmi Hebbalkar during a session in the Legislative Council.

Justice M Nagaprasanna issued these directions while addressing a petition filed by Ravi, who is seeking to quash the FIR. During the hearing, Ravi's counsel, senior advocate C V Nagesh, referenced a Supreme Court decision from March 2024 in the case of Sita Soren vs Union of India, arguing that legislative immunity should shield Ravi from police investigation since the incident occurred within the legislative premises. Justice Nagaprasanna remarked on the complexity of jurisdiction in this case, stating, "The issue boils down to the issue of jurisdiction: whether the Speaker can close the proceedings, or the it can be investigated by an external agency. The issue needs an answer." *—PTI*

'ILL-INFORMED'

Microfinance firms deny harassment charges

BENGALURU, 23 JAN

The Microfinance Industry Network (MFIN) on Thursday dismissed reports about alleged harassment by microfinance companies in the State, claiming that a small section of "ill-informed" individuals with the aid of unauthorised entities were indulging in "unscrupulous" rumourmongering.

Recently, various organisations protested in State condemning the atrocities and oppression by microfinance companies and demanded action against them.

The MFIN is a Self-Regulatory Organisation recognised by RBI and the Association of Karnataka Microfinance Institutions.

Rama Kamaraju, Head, State Initiatives, MFIN urged the media to carry out a thorough fact check of any issues being reported on the sector so that the MF ecosystem is shielded from any untoward rumours.

"Having said that, we are open to talk and engage on the right forum to address any genuine concerns with regard to the microfinance ecosystem and its operations," he added.

The MFIN is a Self-Regulatory Organisation recognised by RBI and the Association of Karnataka Microfinance Institutions **PHOTO: PTI**

- On 20 January, a 60-year-old woman in Ramanagara near Bengaluru died by suicide after being allegedly harassed by loan recovery agents.

According to the police, on 20 January, a 60-year-old woman in Ramanagara near Bengaluru died by suicide after being allegedly harassed by loan recovery agents.

In another incident, a 50-year-old woman from the same district ended her life due to alleged harassment by a microfinance company after she was unable to repay the loan amount of Rs 1 lakh she availed through the company. *—PTI*

25 MNREGS workers injured in Belagavi crash

BELAGAVI, 23 JAN

A 42-year-old biker was killed and 25 MNREGS workers were injured after the goods vehicle in which they were traveling in allegedly toppled near Hosur village in this district on Thursday, police said.

The deceased is Adiveppa Basavanni Ankali, an ex-serviceman, a native of Avaragolla village in Davanagere district, they said.

According to the police, a group of 45 Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREG) workers were travelling in the goods vehicle from Yamakamamaradi to Hidkal dam for work when a bike suddenly came in front of it. The driver allegedly lost control while trying to avoid a collision and the vehicle toppled.

The motorcyclist was coming from Hosur village and died in the accident, a senior police officer said.

- According to the police, a group of 45 Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act workers were travelling in the goods vehicle from Yamakamamaradi to Hidkal dam for work when a bike suddenly came in front of it.

Among the 25 injured, four of them sustained grievous injuries. All of them are being treated at three different hospitals, he said.

A case of accident has been registered, police said, adding that further investigation is underway. *—PTI*

Delhi police launches 2 AI chatbots for polls

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

Delhi police have introduced two AI-driven chatbots, Chunav Mitra and Cyber Sarthi, to assist their personnel and paramilitary forces with their election-related duties, an officer said. The bilingual chatbots, available in Hindi and English, will ensure effective management of the upcoming Delhi Assembly polls. The applications will ensure the timely dissemination of critical instructions and guidelines issued by the Election Commission of India and the Delhi Police. Chunav Mitra provides real-time access to rules, directives and field instructions, while 'Cyber Sarthi' focuses on cybersecurity. It equips personnel with essential guidelines for the safe use of digital tools and platforms, ensuring the security of sensitive election-related information. These applications were developed under the guidance of Delhi Police Commissioner Sanjay Arora *—PTI*

Foreign Secy Misri to visit Beijing on 26-27 Jan

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri will travel to Beijing on a two-day trip beginning Sunday to hold talks with his Chinese counterpart, in the second such high-profile visit from India to China in less than one-and-a-half months. Last month, National Security Adviser (NSA) Ajit Doval visited Beijing and held talks with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi under the framework of Special Representatives (SR) dialogue on the boundary dispute. "Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri will be visiting Beijing on 26 and 27 January for a meeting of the Foreign Secretary-Vice Minister mechanism between India and China," the Ministry of External Affairs said. It is expected that the two sides would touch topics including ways to deescalate the situation along the LAC. *—PTI*

Kerala MLA to present pvt bill for men's commission

T'PURAM, 23 JAN

Congress MLA Eldhose P Kunnappilly said he is planning to present a private member's bill demanding the formation of a commission for men's rights in assembly to combat the "increasing false and concocted" cases of sexual harassment against men. Kunnappilly, who is also an implicated in a sexual assault case, said the draft of the bill was ready. The MLA suggested that there should be a commission dedicated to protecting men's rights which will allow men to approach and file complaints. He said women were misusing the protective cover given to them to trap men in sexual harassment cases. He said he was not trying to defend his case, but instead defending the rights of many who face harassment due to false charges. *—PTI*

Former Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal at a public meeting; AAP leader Raghav Chadha during a roadshow in support of party candidate Mukesh Kumar Goyal ahead of the Delhi Assembly elections, in New Delhi on Thursday *PHOTO: PTI*

Kejri says Amit Shah ordered Oppn men to attack his car

The former CM says Delhi police is BJP's personal army

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

Former Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday alleged that the police allowed the opposition candidate's men to attack his car on the orders of Union Home Minister Amit Shah.

On X after addressing the public in Hari Nagar, Kejriwal said, "Today in Hari Nagar, the police allowed the opposition candidate's men to enter my public meeting and then attacked my car. All this is happening on Amit Shah's orders.

"Amit Shah has made the Delhi Police a personal army of the BJP," Kejriwal claimed.

In a video message, he underscored his commitment to providing jobs for the youth, stating, "My top priority will be to provide employment to our youths. Our team is drafting a detailed plan."

Amit Shah *PHOTO: ANI*

Meanwhile, ahead of the elections, AAP's Jangpura candidate, Manish Sisodia, welcomed numerous BJP leaders and workers who have joined AAP. This shift comes as Sisodia, the former deputy chief minister, faces stiff competition in Jangpura after relocating from his previous seat in Patparganj. Notable members include acting BJP figures such as Vijaypal Singh and Mohit Chaudhary. Sisodia remarked, "Influenced by AAP's policies and Kejriwal's leadership, many BJP leaders have joined us," indicating a strengthened campaign for the upcoming polls. With elections slated for 5 February and results on 8 February AAP seeks to secure a third consecutive term amidst increasing competition from the BJP and Congress. *—PTI*

"AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal had committed the sin of converting the Yamuna into a dirty drain. I want to ask Kejriwal whether he can bathe in the Yamuna in Delhi along with his ministers

Yogi Adityanath, UP CM

Delhi has 1,200 e-buses, thanks to Centre: PM

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Thursday that over 1,200 electric buses provided by the central government are running in the national capital as part of the wider efforts to reduce carbon footprint. He cited the programme to promote rooftop solar panels as another initiative to this effect.

Modi made the remarks during an interaction with students at the Central Hall of Samvidhan Sadan (old Parliament building) where dignitaries, including Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge besides the prime minister, paid tributes to iconic freedom fighter Subhas Chandra Bose on his birth anniversary.

He also explained to the students about the 'PM Suryagarh Yojana' as a tool to tackle climate change. As part of the scheme, solar panels were installed on house rooftops to produce electricity, eliminating the need to pay electricity bills.

The electricity generated could be used to charge e-vehicles, cutting down on the spending on fossil fuels and curbing pollution, he added. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Delhi needs Sheila Dikshit's dvpt model: Rahul

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday said Delhi now wants the "real development model" of former chief minister Sheila Dikshit and not the "false propaganda and PR model" of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and AAP convenor Arvind Kejriwal.

Gandhi shared on Facebook a video montage highlighting issues such as inflation, unemployment, pollution and corruption.

"Bad construction, dirt, inflation, unemployment, pollution and corruption - the truth of Delhi is in front of the public," the former Congress chief said in his Facebook post in Hindi.

"Delhi now wants the same real development model of Sheila Dikshit ji, not the false propaganda and PR model of Modi and Kejriwal," Gandhi said ahead the Assembly polls. *—PTI*

TRUMP 2.0 IMPACT

India always open to undocumented Indians' return: EAM

WASHINGTON DC, 23 JAN

India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has reiterated the country's openness to the legitimate return of undocumented Indians while maintaining a firm opposition to illegal migration. Speaking to Indian reporters in Washington, Jaishankar stated that New Delhi is currently verifying the identities of individuals from the United States who might be deported, but stressed that the number of such cases remains undetermined.

"We are very supportive of legal mobility as we believe in a global workplace. However, we firmly oppose illegal mobility because it often accompanies other illegal activities, which harms our reputation," Jaishankar explained. He mentioned ongoing discussions regarding a reported 1,80,000 Indians in the US who are undocumented or have overstayed their visas, clarifying that while current debates are sensitive, India's position has been consistent.

Jaishankar also emphasised the importance of facilitating legal and mutually beneficial mobility, citing the lengthy wait times for visas as a concern that does not serve the bilateral relationship well. "While I've seen some numbers, I caution about them because a number is only significant once we've validated that the individual is of Indian origin," he added.

In a separate development, Jaishankar confirmed that there have been no talks with Pakistan regarding the resumption of trade, stating that any initiative would need to come from Islamabad. He recalled that trade was halted by Pakistan in August 2019, following India's revocation of the special status of Jammu and Kashmir, leading to a downgrading of diplomatic ties. *—PTI*

No Central funds for Wayanad yet: Vijayan

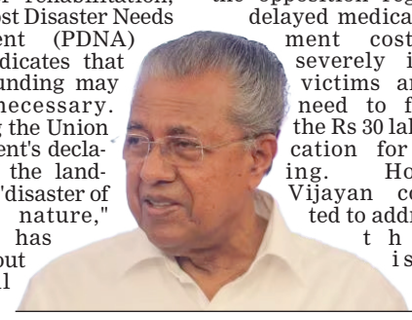
T'PURAM , 23 JAN

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan revealed on Thursday that the state has not yet received any assistance from the Centre for rehabilitating survivors of the Wayanad landslide. However, Rs 712.98 crore from the Chief Minister's Disaster Relief Fund (CMDRF) will be allocated to support those affected.

Initially, Kerala sought Rs 2,221 crore from the Centre for rehabilitation, but the Post Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) report indicates that greater funding may be necessary. Following the Union Government's declaration of the landslide as a "disaster of severe nature," Vijayan has reached out to all Members of Parliament, requesting contributions of up to Rs 1 crore each.

Responding to queries during the Legislative Assembly, Vijayan assured that the CMDRF funds will be effectively utilised for the survivors, and the rehabilitation process would be expedited. Additionally, he announced that individuals opting to remain outside the proposed townships would receive Rs 15 lakh each.

Concerns were raised by the opposition regarding delayed medical treatment costs for severely injured victims and the need to finalise the Rs 30 lakh allocation for housing. However Vijayan committed to addressing these issues. *—PTI*



Biren warns social media users over fake posts

IMPHAL, 23 JAN

Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh has issued a stern warning to social media page administrators who post content that breaches the law and invades personal privacy. He highlighted the emergence of numerous new organisations since the ethnic crisis began in May 2023, many of which engage in anti-social activities, such as extortion and assault.

During a press briefing, Singh remarked on the signs of improving stability in the state and sought media cooperation to facilitate a return to normalcy. He expressed concern over recent communal posts that intruded on individuals' personal lives, citing alarming incidents of unauthorized interrogations of women that had been shared online. "These actions are disturbingly uncivilized," he stated, adding that he has alerted police and intelligence agencies regarding these matters.

While government has been cautious in its approach due to the ongoing violence, he noted that the situation has become intolerable. He reported that individuals involved in damaging properties, including those of elected representatives, have been arrested, with some facing charges under the National Security Act. *—PTI*

Alotted Ladki Bahin funds won't be taken back: Ajit

MUMBAI, 23 JAN

Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar said that there would be no recovery of funds disbursed under the 'Mukhyamantri Majhi Ladki Bahin Yojana' scheme. Pawar's assurance comes amid Opposition claims that the government will trim the list of beneficiaries, take back the money disbursed to ineligible persons.

The Ladki Bahin scheme, launched before the 2024 state assembly election, provides eligible women from financially disadvantaged sections a monthly allowance of Rs 1,500. *—PTI*

ED attaches assets of TN Minister in laundering case

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

The Enforcement Directorate Thursday said it has attached fresh properties worth Rs 1.26 crore of Tamil Nadu minister Anitha R Radhakrishnan in a money laundering probe against him linked to alleged possession of disproportionate assets.

A provisional order has been issued under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) to attach these immovable assets located in Thoothukudi, Madurai and Chennai, the federal agency said in a statement.

The minister could not be contacted immediately for a response. Earlier, assets of the minister worth about Rs 1 crore were attached by the agency in 2022. Radhakrishnan, 73, is a DMK MLA from the Tiruchendur assembly seat in Thoothukudi and the fisheries and animal husbandry minister.

Anitha R Radhakrishnan *PHOTO: X*

The money laundering case stems from an FIR filed by the Tamil Nadu Directorate of Vigilance and Anti-Corruption (DVAC) against Radhakrishnan for "acquiring assets disproportionate to his known sources of income in the name of his family members." DVAC, according to the ED, has also filed charge sheet alleging the minister "acquired" assets disproportionate to his known sources of income to the tune of Rs 2.07 crore between the check period from 14.05.2001 to 31.03.2006. *—PTI*

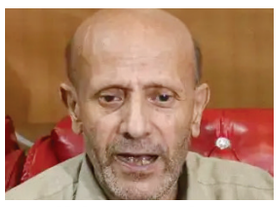


PHOTO: PTI

Delhi HC seeks NIA stand on J&K MP Rashid's plea

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

The Delhi High Court on Thursday sought NIA's stand on Jammu and Kashmir MP Rashid Engineer's plea over his bail in a terror-funding case. Justice Vikas Mahajan asked the National Investigation Agency (NIA) to file its response and posted the hearing on 30 January. On 24 December last year, additional sessions judge Chander Jit Singh -- who had requested the district judge to transfer the case to a court designated to try lawmakers as Rashid became an MP -- dismissed Rashid's plea urging him to pronounce the verdict on his pending bail application in the NIA case. *—PTI*

INTEGRITY OF ELECTIONS

CEC warns of fake narratives impacting elections

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar has alerted electoral bodies to the dangers posed by fake narratives, emphasising that such misinformation can severely undermine public trust in electoral processes. During an international conference organised by the Election Commission, Kumar noted that misinformation is often strategically deployed to disrupt critical aspects of the polling process.

Representatives from various countries, including Uzbekistan, Sri Lanka, Mauritius, Indonesia, and Kazakhstan, shared their experiences with misinformation and disinformation on social media, which they believe threatens the integrity of upcoming elections. Abdool Rahman, the Chief Election Commissioner of Mauritius, highlighted the detrimental effects of fake news, stressing that it damages voters' confidence in electoral authorities.

Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar said misinformation can severely undermine public trust in electoral processes *PHOTO: PTI*

He cited instances of fraudulent online job applications for election staff as an example of the misuse of technology contributing to this misinformation crisis. A spokesperson from Namibia expressed concerns about the growing prevalence of fake news and sought collaborative strategies to combat it. Meanwhile, Idhan Holik, the Commissioner from the General Election Commission of Indonesia, discussed their proactive approach of employing a dedicated WhatsApp channel to address misinformation in real time.

Kumar also addressed a shift towards AI-driven methods, online and remote voting, and biometric authentication. He urged election management bodies worldwide to embrace technological advancements to make elections more transparent, inclusive, and accessible. Emphasising their crucial role, he called on participants to enhance the global impact and reach of electoral processes. *—PTI*

EC VOTER DATA

Total voters	: 99.1cr
Total voters (LS polls)	: 96.88cr
Increase in voters	: 2.22cr
Youth voters (18-29 years)	: 21.7cr
Electoral gender ratio (2024):	948
Electoral gender ratio (2025):	954
Projected total voters	: 1B+
Projected women voters	: 48cr+

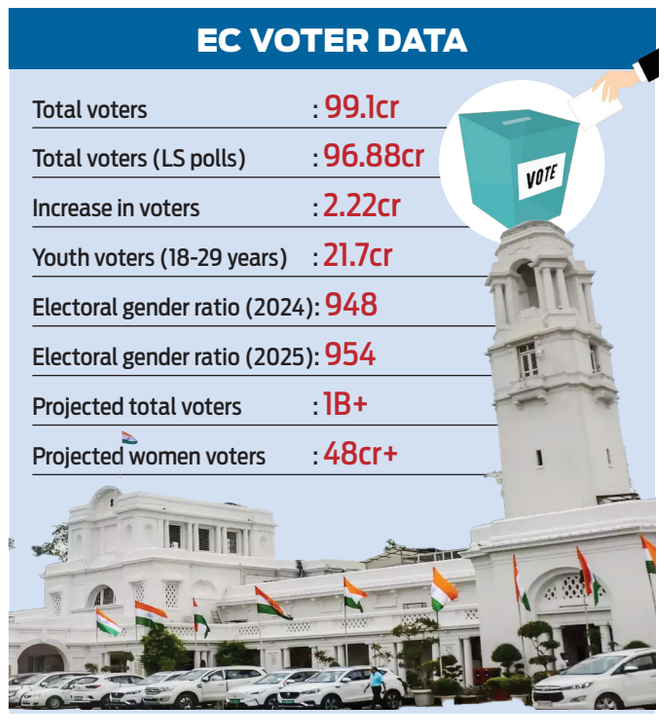


PHOTO: X

Mumbai school gets bomb threat email, probe on

MUMBAI, 23 JAN

A school in the Jogeshwari-Oshiwara area of Mumbai received a bomb threat on Thursday, police said. Acting on the bomb threat email, emergency response teams were dispatched to the school. "The local law enforcement, along with an explosive detection team conducted a thorough search at the school," said Mumbai Police. Earlier last week, Delhi Police cracked down on a series of hoax bomb threats sent to over 400 schools across the national capital and arrested a juvenile responsible for the menacing emails, officials said. After this, Union Minister Piyush Goyal said it is the work of depraved minds to destabilise social harmony and the progress of the nation. *—PTI*

Stray dogs maul 3-year-old boy to death in Mathura

MATHURA, 23 JAN

A three-year-old boy was mauled to death by stray dogs while playing outside his house in the Kosi Kalan town of the district, police said. Ashish Sharma, Circle Officer (CO) of Chhata, said, "The incident occurred around 3pm on Wednesday when the boy, identified as Sofiyan, was playing outside his home (in the Eidgah Colony). A pack of six stray dogs surrounded him, attacked, and dragged him, leaving him grievously injured." Other children who witnessed the attack informed the boy's family, Sharma added. "The family members rushed to the spot, used sticks to drive the dogs away, and rescued the child. But by then, he had suffered severe injuries, with bite and claw marks all over his body," Sharma said. The boy was initially taken to a nearby private hospital, where doctors referred him to a district hospital due to the severity of his injuries. However, Sofiyan succumbed to his injuries on the way to the hospital, officials said. *—PTI*

2 arrested for pelting stones at Steel Express

KOLKATA, 23 JAN

The Railway Protection Force (RPF) arrested two persons for allegedly pelting stones at 12813 Howrah-Tatanagar Steel Express, a South Eastern Railway (SER) official said on Thursday. The incident took place near Ghatsila station in Galudih-Rakhamines section of Kharagpur division of SER around 9.20pm on Monday, he said. Following an investigation, the RPF arrested the two accused, aged 19 and 24, on Wednesday. Both of them, residents of East Singhbhum district in Jharkhand, are being prosecuted in a court of law in Chaibasa, he added. *—PTI*

UP man kills two minor cousins by sitting their throats

HATHRAS, 23 JAN

Two minor sisters, the youngest just six, were killed allegedly by their cousin who slit their throats in the dead of the night before attacking their mother and bedridden father with an intention to wipe out the entire family, police said Thursday. The horrific incident occurred during the intervening night of Wednesday and Thursday at the family's home in Ashirwad Dham Colony of Hathras' Sadar Kotwali area, they said. While Vikas allegedly killed his two cousins – Srishti,14, and Vidhi, 6, – by slitting their throats with a sharp object, his uncle and aunt survived the assault but have been hospitalised with serious injuries, officials said. While a family feud is suspected to be the reason behind why Vikas launched the murderous attack, police said they are investigating the motive behind the crime. *—PTI*

Ajit: Tea-seller's fire hoax caused Pushpak tragedy

Four Nepal nationals among eight deceased identified

PUNE, 23 JAN

Maharashtra's Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar stated that the recent Jalgaon train accident, which claimed the lives of 13 individuals, was sparked by a "sheer rumour" of a fire on the Pushpak Express, leading to chaos among passengers.

The incident occurred on Wednesday evening when some passengers of the Lucknow-Mumbai Pushpak Express disembarked after an alarm chain was pulled, resulting in several being struck by the Karnataka Express travelling on adjacent tracks. Reports confirm that 13 persons died, including four individuals from Nepal, and at least 15 others sustained injuries.

Pawar revealed that a tea-seller shouted about a supposed fire in a coach of the Pushpak Express. This prompted two passengers from Shravasti, Uttar Pradesh, to spread the alarming news, causing confusion and panic within the general coach and the adjoining carriage. "In their fear, some passengers jumped off the train to escape," Pawar explained.

Police personnel inspect tracks a day after the train accident in Maharashtra's Jalgaon district *PHOTO: PTI*

As the train was moving at speed when the chain was pulled, it came to a halt, and the passengers began to leave the train, unaware of the approaching Karnataka Express. Pawar described the impact of the accident as devastating, noting, "The bodies were mutilated." Of the deceased, ten have been identified, including children and elderly women.

Special Inspector General of Police Dattatraya Karale reported that among the deceased, the four identified victims from Nepal included Kamala Navin Bhandari, 43, Javakala Bhate , 60, Lachchiram Khataru Pasi, 40, and Imtiyaz Ali, 11.

Treatment for the injured is ongoing at local facilities, with assistance provided from Central Railway personnel, who distributed an ex-gratia of Rs 2.70 lakh to nine of those affected. Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis pledged financial assistance of Rs 5 lakh to the families of the deceased, while the Railway Board announced further compensation for victims and their families. *—PTI*

FOREIGN FUNDS VIOLATIONS

CBI chargesheets Oxfam India, ex-CEO Behar

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

The CBI has filed a chargesheet against Oxfam India and its former CEO Amitabh Behar regarding alleged violations of regulations relating to foreign funding, officials said.

The chargesheet was submitted to a special court in New Delhi, naming both the organisation and Behar, who currently serves as the executive director of Oxfam International. The FIR against Oxfam India was registered in April 2023, following a complaint from the Ministry of Home Affairs.

According to the complaint, which forms part of the FIR, Oxfam India is accused of attempting to bypass legal restrictions after its Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) registration expired. It is alleged that the organisation was seeking alternative methods to receive funds despite its registration not being renewed.

The complaint also referenced emails found during an income tax survey conducted by the Central Board of Direct Taxes. These communications allegedly revealed that Oxfam India planned to apply pressure on the Indian government for FCRA renewal through foreign governments and organisations.

In response to the allegations, Oxfam India stated that it has always adhered to Indian laws. "Oxfam India is fully compliant with Indian laws and has filed all statutory returns timely since its inception," the NGO remarked, asserting its cooperation with government agencies following the non-renewal of its FCRA registration in December 2021. An email seeking comment from Oxfam India had gone unanswered at the time of reporting. *—PTI*

Kapil Sharma, Remo D'Souza get death threats via email

MUMBAI, 23 JAN

Comedian Kapil Sharma and actor Rajpal Yadav and choreographer Remo D'Souza have reportedly received death threats through an email.

The threatening message was sent to Yadav's email account from a person named Vishnu, who allegedly warned that Sharma, his family, his associates, and Rajpal Yadav would be killed.

The email, sent on 14 December, 2024, raised concerns and led to a formal complaint.

At this stage, the police have not identified the person responsible, and investigations continue.

Kapil Sharma, known for his wit and humour, has been a beloved figure in Indian entertainment for years.

Kapil Sharma; Remo D'Souza *PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA*

"We have been monitoring your recent activities, and we believe it is imperative that we bring a sensitive matter to your attention. This is not a publicity stunt or an attempt to harass you," the email said, asking them to "treat this message with the utmost seriousness and confidentiality".

Preliminary inquiry suggested that the mail, sent from the mail ID 'don99284@gmail.com', was sent from Pakistan, the police official said, adding that the investigation into the matter is underway.

Meanwhile, Choreographer Remo D'Souza and singer and stand-up comedian Sugandha Mishra have approached the Oshiwara police station with similar complaints, he added. *—PTI*

CHEQUE BOUNCE CASE

RGV gets three months in jail

MUMBAI, 23 JAN

A court here has sentenced filmmaker Ram Gopal Varma to three months imprisonment in a cheque bounce case and issued a non-bailable arrest warrant against him.

Judicial Magistrate (First Class) in Andheri, YP Pujari, on Tuesday convicted Varma for the offence punishable under the provisions of the Negotiable Instruments Act.

The court also directed the filmmaker to pay compensation of Rs 3,72,219 to the complainant within three months from the date of the order. The detailed order was not available yet.

Since Varma was not present before the court when the order was passed, it issued a standing non-bailable warrant against him for his arrest for execution of the sentence as per the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC).

Ram Gopal Varma *PHOTO: X*

The complaint of cheque bounce was registered against Varma's firm in 2018 by a company. The court had granted bail to Varma in April 2022 on a cash security of Rs 5,000.

"With regard to the news about me and Andheri court, I want to clarify that it is to do with a 7 year old case of Rs 2 lakh 38 thousand amount, relating to my ex-employee.. My advocates are attending," the filmmaker later posted on his X account.

"It is not about settling the rupees 2.38 lakh. The contention was about refusing to be exploited in the attempts to fabricate ..Anyway that's all I can say for now," the post further said. *—PTI*

CBI shuts 'fake' loan case against DHFL, directors

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

The CBI has closed the case against the Dewan Housing Finance Limited (DHFL), and its directors pertaining to 2.60 lakh allegedly fictitious home loan accounts, some of which were used to claim interest subsidies under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna, officials said.

After over three years of probe, the agency could not find evidence suggesting a criminal conspiracy which could have led to the creation of such accounts, they said.

It was alleged that DHFL had opened a fictitious branch in Bandra and fake accounts worth Rs 14,046 crore of home-loan borrowers, who had already repaid their loans, were entered in the database, they said.

A total of 2.60 lakh "fake and fictitious" home loan accounts were created in the non-existent branch from 2007-19 for a total loan worth Rs 14,046 crore, out of which Rs 11,755.79 crore were deposited or routed to several fictitious firms known as Bandra Book firms, the CBI had alleged in the FIR.

Several of these bogus loan accounts were linked in the Pradhan Mantri Awas (PMAY) to claim interest subsidies from the National Housing Bank in connivance with its officials, the CBI had alleged.

- After over three years of probe, the agency could not find evidence suggesting a criminal conspiracy which could have led to the creation of such accounts, the investigators said

The DHFL had allegedly processed 88,651 cases under the PMAY till December 2018, and it received an interest subsidy of Rs 539.40 crore, while it has to receive Rs 1,347.80 crore from the government, it had said. *—PTI*

12 hrs on, elephant fallen in Kerala well waits for rescue

MALAPPURAM, 23 JAN

An elephant fell into a private well in this district on Thursday morning, and the forest department is facing difficulties in rescuing the pachyderm as locals want it to be relocated to some deep forest area instead of releasing in the same area again.

Over 12 hours since it fell into the well, the elephant is still awaiting rescue as residents are against releasing the tusker in the same area.

Meanwhile, ex-Nilambur MLA and present convener of the Trinamool Congress PV Anvar said the elephant should be killed by filling the well with mud.

"As they do in foreign countries, what should be killed, should be killed," he said while speaking to reporters after reaching Urangattiri village here where the elephant fell into the well at around 1 am.

He urged the public to stand together and not allow any Forest Department office to function in Kerala.

The Nilambur DFO Karthik P said that a team, including a veterinary doctor, was coming from Wayanad to assess the situation and examine the feasibility of tranquilising it.

DFO Karthik P said a team was coming from Wayanad to assess the situation and examine the feasibility of tranquilising the wild elephant *REPRESENTATIVE IMAGE*

- Trinamool Congress convener PV Anvar said the elephant should be killed by filling the well with mud. "As they do in foreign countries, what should be killed, should be killed," he said

The DFO said that a request has been sent to the Chief Wildlife Warden to issue an order to capture the elephant.

The official also said that steps will be taken in coordination with other departments to resolve the issue of wild elephant menace in the area and address the concerns of the people of the area. *—PTI*

Bird flu scare: 4,200 chicks found dead in M'rashtra

LATUR, 23 JAN

Nearly 4,200 chicks have been found dead at a poultry farm in Maharashtra's Latur district, following the recent death of around 60 crows due to bird flu, officials reported on Thursday.

The dead chicks, aged five to six days, were discovered in Dhalegaon village, Ahmedpur tehsil. Samples of the carcasses were collected and sent to the State Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory in Aundh, Pune, on Wednesday.

Dr Shridhar Shinde, Deputy Commissioner for Animal Husbandry, confirmed that a team had visited the site. The deaths reportedly occurred over two to three days. The poultry farm owner delayed reporting the deaths, which allowed the infection to spread, ultimately leading to the loss of 4,200 of the 4,500 chicks he had purchased.

Dr Shivaji Kshirsagar, Deputy Commissioner of the Ahmedpur veterinary hospital, urged poultry farm owners to register their farms and to notify local officials promptly in such situations. *—PTI*

REEL OR REAL?

Was he acting: Nitesh Rane on Saif Ali Khan's knife attack

PUNE, 23 JAN

Maharashtra Cabinet minister Nitesh Rane on Thursday said the way Saif Ali Khan came out of hospital following a knife attack made him wonder if the actor was "really attacked or was acting".

Earlier, Bangladeshis entering the country illegally were found on roadsides, now they enter homes, the BJP leader said, referring to a man hailing from the neighbouring country being arrested for entering the actor's residence in Mumbai and stabbing him.

The stabbing incident occurred on 16 January, when Khan, 54, was attacked in his 12th-floor apartment in the upscale Bandra area during an attempted robbery. He sustained multiple stab wounds and underwent two surgeries at the Lilavati Hospital here.

PHOTO: X

The actor was discharged from the hospital on Tuesday.

Police have arrested the intruder, identified as Shareeful Islam Shehzad Mohammad Rohilla Amin Fakir, a 30-year-old Bangladeshi national who illegally entered India last year and assumed the alias Vijay Das.

He is currently in police custody, and initial investigations indicate he intended to commit theft during the attack.

"The third piece of the knife, which comprises the handle and some part of the blade, was recovered from close to Bandra Talao, more than a kilometre away from the actor's residence in Satguru Sharan building. We took the accused to the lake on Wednesday evening and recovered this missing part of the knife," the Bandra police station official said. *—PTI*

Saif's family faces uncertainty over Rs 15,000 crore Bhopal properties

BHOPAL, 23 JAN

Actor Saif Ali Khan's family is facing uncertainty over their ownership of properties worth Rs 15,000 crore in Bhopal, inherited from the city's erstwhile rulers. The matter is currently tied up in court due to an order from the Office of the Custodian of Enemy Property, which could see the Centre taking control of the properties if an appeal is not filed within a stipulated time period.

The properties, estimated to be valued at nearly Rs 15,000 crore, were inherited by Saif Ali Khan's great-grandmother Sajida Sultan Begum, the eldest daughter of Nawab Hamidullah, after the partition of India.

The succession was then passed down to Mansoor Ali Khan Pataudi, father of Saif Ali Khan, and subsequently to him.

The properties were inherited by Saif Ali Khan's great-grandmother Sajida Sultan Begum, the eldest daughter of Nawab Hamidullah, after the Partition and passed on to the actor *PHOTO: X*

However, the Custodian of Enemy Property, acting under the Enemy Property Act 1968, had in 2015 declared the properties as "Enemy Property", as one of Sajida Sultan Begum's sisters and her husband had emigrated to Pakistan.

Saif's mother, Sharmila Tagore, had challenged this order in the Madhya Pradesh High Court, which had directed the family to file an appeal within 30 days. *—PTI*

THAILAND SAYS YES TO LOVE

Thai actors Apiwat 'Porsch' Apiwatsayree and Sappanyoo 'Arm' Panatkool registered their marriage on Thursday following the legalisation of same-sex marriage by Thailand. Thailand is the first Southeast Asian country to enact the Marriage Equality Act, granting equal rights to same-sex couples. Over 300 LGBTQ+ couples tied the knot in the nation's first mass wedding ceremony. The marriage equality bill amended the Civil and Commercial Code to change the words 'men and women' and 'husband and wife' to 'individuals' and 'marriage partners' ***PHOTO: X***

Netaji's kin renew demand for return of his remains

Refuting perceptions of roadblocks to bring back the mortal remains held in an urn in a Buddhist temple in Renkoji in Japan, widely believed to be that of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, a section of descendants of the national hero claim they have documentary evidence to prove that the temple authorities have always been more than willing to hand over the 'ashes' to India.

The demand to bring back the remains and conduct DNA tests to affirm whether they indeed belong to one of the tallest figures of India's freedom struggle has been an abiding wish of a significant bulk of Netaji admirers who seek closure to one of India's longest persisting enigma: whether Bose perished in the aftermath of a fatal Japanese military aircraft crash in present-day Taiwan, on 18 August, 1945.

Reports of as many as 10 national and international enquiries probing Netaji's disappearance on that fateful day, now available in the national archives in New Delhi, have confirmed Bose's death at a hospital in the Japanese military airfield in Taihoku, now Taiwan, as a result of the severe burn injuries he suffered in the crash.

An exception to those committees' findings was that of the Commission chaired by retired Supreme Court judge Manoj Kumar Mukherjee, the last of the probe panels constituted by the Union government, which submitted its report in November 2005 and concluded that Bose "is dead", though he "did not die in the plane crash, as alleged".

"The ashes in the Japanese temple are not of Netaji," the Commission had further concluded. The Indian government had rejected the findings of the Commission.

The confusion over the alleged "lack of cooperation" from the Renkoji temple priests, some descendants of Netaji maintained, could have arisen from the Mukherjee Commission report which blamed the "Temple authorities' reticence" in allowing commission-designated experts to physically inspect and collect "potentially less charred bone pieces from the casket lying in their custody" for conducting DNA tests.

Sand artist Sudarsan Pattnaik creates a sculpture on Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's birthday anniversary, at Odisha's Puri beach ***PHOTO: PTI***

Speaking to PTI on the eve of Netaji's 128th birth anniversary, Chandra Kumar Bose, the leader's grandnephew, said, "The PMO and the Indian government must respond to the numerous letters sent by Prof Anita Bose Pfaff, Netaji's daughter and other members of the Bose family regarding arrangements to bring Netaji's remains to India, which is lying in a foreign country."

"Netaji wanted to return to Independent India, but he could not as he sacrificed his life fighting for India's freedom. It is an act of sacrilege that his remains continue to lie in Japan. There is conclusive evidence that the remains are of Netaji in 10 enquiry reports.

"However, if the government feels the remains are not of Netaji, then a statement must be issued to this effect. Mere silence is an insult to the memory of this great leader," he added, drawing attention to the cold and solitary locale of Renkoji where the remains lie preserved for nearly eight decades.

Madhuri Bose, grand-niece of Subhas Bose, maintains that Reverend Mochizuki, head priest of the Renkoji temple as well as successive governments of India and Japan were "at the time entirely supportive of DNA testing on the remains and... certainly took no actions to deny access to the remains."

In her foreword to the recently published book, 'From Shadows To Light: The Truth of Netaji's Mortal End', authored by Bose researcher Sumeru Roy Chaudhury, Madhuri alleged that certain parts of the translation from Japanese of the original letter from the temple authorities which was included in the Mukherjee Commission report were "inexplicably missing".

The missing part "is a clear reaffirmation of his firm commitment to a DNA testing process, expressed as follows: My father (the first Reverend Mochizuki) used to tell me when he was alive that the remains should be returned to India. I felt that if I accepted the proposal for DNA testing and the remains would eventually be returned to India, my father's soul and spirit could finally be at rest," Madhuri wrote.

"Many of us in the family are convinced that Netaji succumbed to his injuries in 1945," she told PTI, "Those who feel otherwise are free to pursue their theories but they must bring conclusive proof for the same."

Surya Kumar Bose, the eldest son of Netaji's nephew Amiya Nath Bose, who paid multiple visits to the Renkoji temple and spoke to its current priests, also confirmed the willingness of the authorities to cooperate for scientific tests on the remains.

"In my last visit in 2019, I met the current head priest and the widow of the priest who met Justice Mukherjee. They were consistent in their willingness to hand over the remains for testing," he said.

Author-researcher Roy Chaudhury said that the now-declassified Netaji files revealed at least two government correspondences, one during the 1990s and the other at a subsequent date, which underscored "no political benefits" in bringing back the remains.

"The Manmohan Singh government had made significant progress in getting the remains transferred to the newly-built Indian embassy office in Tokyo. The move got stonewalled once Singh's term ended," he said.

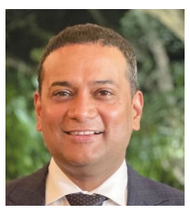
"Narendra Modi has visited Japan, both in his capacity as the Gujarat chief minister and as the Prime Minister of India, more times than any other Indian statesman. But I can't tell you why he never visited Renkoji," Surya Bose added. *—PTI*

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

SALAR سالار

'90-hour work week can hinder creativity & growth'



Mansoor Ali Khan

As a Bengalurean from India's startup capital, where hustle culture is deeply ingrained, my social media feed is abuzz with debates surrounding the concept of a 90-hour workweek.

While some have argued that it paves the way for success, as an educationist, I believe this culture not only harms personal well-being but also stifles opportunities for learning, creativity, and growth.

Having spent years in the field of education, I have come to understand that learning, whether academic or professional, requires time for introspection and rest. A 90-hour workweek leaves little room for intellectual curiosity or skill-building beyond immediate job demands.

When work consumes nearly all waking hours, individuals become less capable of engaging in the critical thinking and problem-solving that drive true innovation.

In fact, research has consistently highlighted the negative effects of overworking on productivity and on mental and physical health. Chronic stress, fatigue, and burnout are inevitable outcomes of a 90-hour workweek, which diminish cognitive performance. How can we expect individuals to learn, innovate, or grow when their mental reserves are depleted? Rest is not a luxury; it is an essential ingredient for productivity and creativity.

Instead of promoting excessive hours, we should advocate for systems that prioritize efficiency, collaboration, and lifelong learning. Workplaces should value results over hours, ensuring employees have the time and energy to invest in their personal and professional development. Encouraging flexible schedules, supporting mental health, and fostering a culture of balance are not just ethical choices—they are also practical strategies to sustain creativity and innovation in the long run.

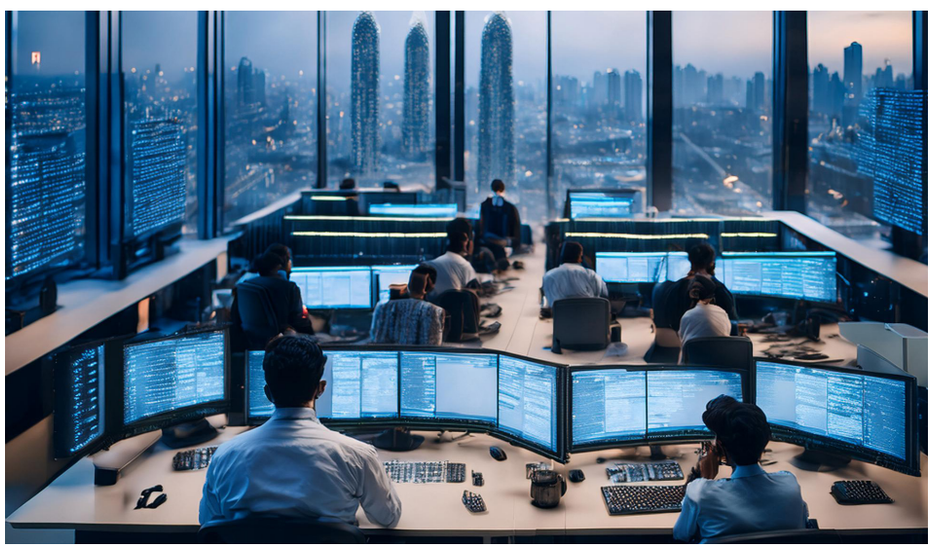
> Instead of promoting excessive hours, we should advocate for systems that prioritize efficiency, collaboration, and lifelong learning.

For individuals, businesses, and society at large, fostering a culture of balance and continuous learning is far more sustainable and rewarding than glorifying exhaustion. It's time to rethink what productivity truly means and create environments where people can thrive—not just survive.

The writer is General Secretary, Management of Independent CBSE Schools Association, Karnataka

WHAT IS THE 90-HOUR WORK DEBATE?

L&T Chairman SN Subramanyan sparked a widespread controversy advocating for a 90-hour work week, including working on Sundays. L&T chairman had come under fire for his remarks on work-week hours and for doubling down the same by asking what employees would do sitting at home instead. "How long can you stare at your wife? Come on, get to the office and start working," he had said. He is not the first one to recommend longer working hours. People such as former Infosys chairman NR Narayana Murty and Ola CEO Bhavish Aggarwal have proposed between 70 and 80-hour work week. The debate has led to a frenzy on social media with citizens calling out the tycoons for toxic work cultures.



Research has consistently highlighted the negative effects of overworking on productivity and on mental and physical health ***PHOTOS: PIXABAY AND AI IMAGE***

Move fast & break things: Trump's $500B AI project has major risks

In one of his first moves as the 47th President of the United States, Donald Trump announced a new US$500 billion project called Stargate to accelerate the development of artificial intelligence (AI) in the US.

The project is a partnership between three large tech companies – OpenAI, SoftBank and Oracle. Trump called it "the largest AI infrastructure project by far in history" and said it would help keep "the future of technology" in the US.

Tech billionaire Elon Musk, however, had a different take, claiming without evidence on his platform X that the project's backers "don't actually have the money". X, which is not included in Stargate, is also working on developing AI and Musk is a rival to OpenAI CEO Sam Altman.

Alongside announcing Stargate, Trump also revoked an executive order signed by his predecessor Joe Biden that was aimed at addressing and controlling AI risks.

Seen together, these two moves embody a mentality common in tech development that can best be summed up by the phrase: "move fast and break things".

What is Stargate?

The US is already the world's frontrunner when it comes to AI development.

The Stargate project will significantly extend this lead over other nations.

It will see a network of data centres built across the US. These centres will house enormous computer servers necessary for running AI programs such as ChatGPT. These servers will run 24/7 and will require significant amounts of electricity and water to operate.

According to a statement by OpenAI, construction of new data centres as part of Stargate is already underway in the US state of Texas:

[W]e are evaluating potential sites across the country for more campuses as we finalise definitive agreements.

An imperfect – but promising – order

The increased investment into AI development by Trump is encouraging. It could help advance the many potential benefits of AI. For example, AI can improve cancer patients' prognosis by rapidly analysing medical data and detecting early signs of disease.

But Trump's simultaneous revocation of Biden's executive order on the "safe, secure and trustworthy development and use of AI" is deeply concerning.

It could mean that any potential benefits of Stargate are quickly trumped by its potential to exacerbate existing harms of AI technologies.

Alongside announcing Stargate, Donald Trump also revoked an executive order signed by his predecessor Joe Biden that was aimed at addressing and controlling AI risks ***PHOTO: PTI***

Yes, Biden's order lacked important technical details. But it was a promising start towards developing safer and more responsible AI systems.

One major issue it was meant to address was tech companies collecting personal data for AI training without first obtaining consent.

AI systems collect data from all over the internet.

Even if data are freely accessible on the internet for human use, it does not mean AI systems should use them for training. Also, once a photo or text is fed into an AI model, it cannot be removed.

There have been numerous cases of artists suing AI art generators for unauthorised use of their work.

> As AI tools increasingly make important decisions, such as résumé screening, minorities are being even more disproportionately affected. For example, AI-powered face recognition software more commonly misidentifies black people and other people of colour, which has lead to false arrests and imprisonment.

Another issue Biden's order aimed to tackle was the risk of harm – especially to people from minority communities.

Most AI tools aim to increase accuracy for the majority. Without proper design, they can make extremely dangerous decisions for a few.

For example, in 2015, an image-recognition algorithm developed by Google automatically tagged pictures of black people as "gorillas".

This same issue was later found in AI systems of other companies such as Yahoo and Apple, and remains unresolved a decade later because these systems are so often inscrutable even to their creators.

This opacity makes it crucial to design AI systems correctly from the start. Problems can be deeply embedded in the AI system itself, worsening over time and becoming nearly impossible to fix.

As AI tools increasingly make important decisions, such as résumé screening, minorities are being even more disproportionately affected.

For example, AI-powered face recognition software more commonly misidentifies black people and other people of colour, which has lead to false arrests and imprisonment.

Faster, more powerful AI systems

Trump's twin AI announcements in the first days of his second term as US president show his main focus in terms of AI – and that of the biggest tech companies in the world – is on developing ever more faster, more powerful AI systems.

If we compare an AI system with a car, this is like developing the fastest car possible while ignoring crucial safety features like seat belts or airbags in order to keep it lighter and thus faster.

For both cars and AI, this approach could mean putting very dangerous machines into the hands of billions of people around the world. *—PTI*

Nepal hikes Mount Everest climbing fee to $15k

KATHMANDU, 23 JAN

Nepal has sharply increased permit fees for climbing Mount Everest by 36 per cent and also introduced a slew of measures aimed at controlling garbage pollution on the world's tallest peak, officials said. Under the revised mountaineering regulations, the royalty fee for foreigners climbing Everest from the normal south route in the spring season (March–May) has been raised to USD 15,000 from USD 11,000 per person. For autumn (September–November), the fee has been increased from USD 5,500 to USD 7,500, whereas for winter (December–February) and monsoon (June–August), it has be hiked from USD 2,750 to USD 3,750. The Cabinet has approved the fee revision and the official announcement is pending, said Tourism Board Director Arati Neupane. *—PTI*

US teen shoots dead female student, self

NASHVILLE, 23 JAN

A female student was killed and another student was wounded on Wednesday in a shooting in a Nashville high school cafeteria, police said. The 17-year-old Solomon Henderson, who was also a student at Antioch High School, later shot and killed himself with a handgun, Metro Nashville Police spokesperson Don Aaron said during a news conference. Police chief John Drake said the shooter "confronted" a 16-year-old female student in the cafeteria and opened fire, killing her on the spot. Police identified her as Josselin Corea Escalante. Drake said police are looking into a motive and whether the students who were shot were targeted. The male student who was wounded suffered a graze and was treated and released from the hospital, Drake said. *—PTI*

Flights between Turkey, Syria resume after 13yrs

ISTANBUL, 23 JAN

Commercial flights between Turkey and Syria resumed on Thursday after 13 years with a Turkish Airlines flight from Istanbul to Damascus. Turkish media showed Syrian families draped in their national flag singing pro-opposition songs and cheering as they prepared to board flight TK0846 to Damascus. Since the lightning rebel offensive that ousted Syrian President Bashar Assad a month ago, Arab and Western countries that had cut off relations with the former government have been reopening diplomatic relations with Syria's new de facto authorities, headed by the Islamist former insurgent group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, or HTS. The first international commercial flight since Assad's fall, a Royal Jordanian Airlines plane, landed in Damascus earlier this month. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Families sue TikTok in France over teenager suicide

CASSIS, 23 JAN

In the moment when her world shattered three years ago, Stephanie Mistre found her 15-year-old daughter, Marie, lifeless in the bedroom where she died by suicide. "I went from light to darkness in a fraction of a second," Mistre said, describing the day in September 2021 that marked the start of her fight against TikTok. Delving into her daughter's phone after her death, Mistre discovered videos promoting suicide methods, tutorials and comments encouraging users to go beyond "mere suicide attempts." She said TikTok's algorithm had repeatedly pushed such content to her daughter. Now Mistre and six other families are suing TikTok France. Of these, two lost a child. *—PTI*

22 states move court for rollback on birthright citizenship abolition

Trump to sign first law as House gives approval to immigrant detention bill

WASHINGTON, 23 JAN

A federal judge in Seattle is set to hear the first arguments on Thursday in a multi-state lawsuit seeking to block President Donald Trump's executive order ending the constitutional guarantee of birthright citizenship regardless of the parents' immigration status.

US District Judge John Coughenour scheduled the session to consider the request from Arizona, Illinois, Oregon and Washington. The case is one of five lawsuits being brought by 22 states and a number of immigrants rights groups across the country.

The suits include personal testimonies from attorneys general who are US citizens by birthright.

The order, signed by Trump on Inauguration Day, is slated to take effect on 19 February. It could impact hundreds of thousands of people born in the country, said one of the lawsuits. In 2022, there were about 2,55,000 births of citizen children to mothers living in the country illegally and about 1,53,000 births to two such parents, said the suit.

The US is among about 30 countries where birthright citizenship is applied.

BIPARTISAN SUPPORT

On Wednesday, the Republican-led House also gave its final approval to a bill that requires the detainment of unauthorised immigrants accused of theft and violent crimes, marking the first legislation that US President Donald Trump can sign as Congress, with some bipartisan support, swiftly moved in line with his plans to crackdown on illegal immigration.

- US District Judge John Coughenour scheduled the session to consider the request from Arizona, Illinois, Oregon and Washington. It is one of five lawsuits filed by 22 states

Passage of the Laken Riley Act, named after a Georgia nursing student who was murdered last year by a Venezuelan man, shows how sharply the political debate over immigration has shifted to the right following Trump's election victory.

Immigration policy has often been one of the most entrenched issues in Congress, but a crucial faction of 46 politically vulnerable Democrats joined with Republicans to lift the strict proposal to passage on a 263–156 vote tally. *—PTI*

1,500 TROOPS TO SEAL US-MEXICO BORDER

WASHINGTON, 23 JAN

The Pentagon on Wednesday said it has begun deploying 1,500 active duty troops to help secure the southern border in the coming days, putting in motion plans US President Donald Trump laid out after he took office to crack down on immigration.

Acting Defence Secretary Robert Salesses said the Pentagon will provide military aircraft to support Department of Homeland Security deportation flights for more than 5,000 detained migrants and the troops will assist in the construction of barriers.

The number of troops and their mission may soon change, Salesses said in a statement. "This is just the beginning," he said. *—PTI*

Saudi Arabia vows to invest $600B in US

DUBAI, 23 JAN

Saudi Arabia's crown prince on Thursday said the kingdom wants to invest USD 600B in the US over the next four years, comments that came after President Donald Trump mused about returning to the kingdom as his first foreign trip.

The comments from Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, reported on Thursday by the state-run Saudi Press Agency, came in a phone call with Trump.

"The crown prince affirmed the kingdom's intention to broaden its investments and trade with the United States over the next four years, in the amount of $600B, and potentially beyond that," the report said.

It did not elaborate on where those investments and trade could be placed. The US in recent years has increasingly pulled away from relying on Saudi oil exports, which once was the bedrock of their relationship for decades. Saudi has taken large stakes in American businesses while also looking at sports. *—PTI*

Insta users can't unfollow Trump, Vance

WASHINGTON, DC, 23 JAN

Social media users have been grumbling on Wednesday that Meta was not allowing them to unfollow US President Donald Trump, Vice President JD Vance and First Lady Melania Trump on Instagram, CNN reported.

"How curious!" Abrams, an American singer and songwriter, wrote as quoted by CNN. "Had to block them in order to make sure I am nowhere near that." *—PTI*

Trump asks Putin to end 'ridiculous' war

WASHINGTON, 23 JAN

US President Donald Trump has warned his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin to end the "ridiculous war" in Ukraine or face high tariffs and further sanctions.

The President, who was sworn in as the 47th US President on 20 January, said this on Truth Social on Wednesday, a social media platform owned by him.

Trump called out Russian President Vladimir Putin by name in the social media post, arguing that he always had a good relationship with the leader, but that it was time to settle "this ridiculous War!"

Asserting that he is looking to hurt Russia and he wants no more lives to be lost in the war, Trump said, "Let's get this war, which never would have started if I were President, over with! We can do it the easy way, or the hard way – and the easy way is always better. It's time to "MAKE A DEAL." NO MORE LIVES SHOULD BE LOST!!!" *—PTI*

Fire-fighters monitor the spread of the Hughes Fire along Lake Castaic in California PHOTO: PTI

BATTLE ON TO DOUSE MASSIVE WILDFIRE NORTH OF LA

CALIFORNIA, 23 JAN

More than 50,000 people were under evacuation orders or warnings on Wednesday, after a huge and fast-moving wildfire swept through rugged mountains north of Los Angeles, as parched Southern California endured another round of dangerous winds and two major previous blazes continued to smoulder.

The Hughes Fire broke out in the morning and within hours, charred more than 39 square km of trees and brush near Lake Castaic, a popular recreation area 64km from the devastating Eaton and Palisades fires that are burning for a third week.

More than 31,000 people have been ordered to evacuate, and another 23,000 are under evacuation warnings, LA County Sheriff Robert Luna said.

LA County Fire Chief Anthony Marrone said the fire remains difficult to contain but fire-fighters are getting the upper hand.

Parts of Interstate 5 that had been closed will shortly be reopened, Luna said.

A 48km stretch of Interstate 5, a major north-south artery, was closed as flames raced along hilltops and down into wooded canyons. Crews on the ground and in water-dropping aircraft tried to prevent the wind-driven fire from moving across the interstate and toward Castaic.

Winds in the area were gusting at 67kmph in the afternoon but were expected to increase to 96kmph by later in the evening and Thursday, the National Weather Service said on X.

Meanwhile to the south, Los Angeles officials began to prepare for potential rain.

Gusty weather was expected to last through Thursday and precipitation was possible starting Saturday, according to the National Weather Service. *—PTI*

Change water policies for aid: Trump

WASHINGTON, 23 JAN

President Donald Trump on Wednesday threatened to withhold federal disaster aid for Los Angeles unless California leaders change the state's approach on its management of water. Trump said the state's fish conservation efforts in its northern part are responsible for fire hydrants running dry in urban areas. *—PTI*

ISRAEL KILLS MILITANTS BEHIND BUS ATTACK

JERUSALEM, 23 JAN

Israeli forces have killed two Palestinian militants who carried out a deadly attack on a bus in the West Bank earlier this month.

The Israeli military said on Thursday that Mohammed Nazzal and Katiba al-Shalabi, members of the Islamic Jihad militant group, had barricaded themselves in a structure in the West Bank village of Burqin and exchanged fire with Israeli troops before they were killed overnight. The army said a soldier was moderately wounded.

The Hamas released a statement claiming the two men were members of its armed wing and praising the bus attack. Hamas and the smaller and more radical Islamic Jihad are allies that sometimes carry out attacks together.

The January 6 attack on the bus carrying Israelis killed three people and wounded six others.

Israel captured the West Bank in the 1967 Mideast war. The Palestinians want it to form the main part of their future state. *—PTI*

Palestinians pass by destruction caused by Israeli ground and air offensive in Rafah, Gaza Strip PHOTO: PTI

TRILLIONS AT STAKE

Putin win will dent NATO image: Rutte

BRUSSELS, 23 JAN

NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte warned on Thursday that a Russian victory over Ukraine would undermine the dissuasive force of the world's biggest military alliance and that its credibility could cost trillions to restore.

NATO has been ramping up its forces along its eastern flank with Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, deploying thousands of troops and equipment to deter Moscow from expanding its war into the territory of any of the organisation's 32 member countries.

"If Ukraine loses, then to restore the deterrence of the rest of NATO again, it will be a much, much higher price than what we are contemplating at this moment in terms of ramping up our spending and ramping up our industrial production," Rutte said.

"It will not be billions extra; it will be trillions extra," he said, on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

Rutte insisted that Ukraine's Western backers must "step up and not scale back the support" they are providing to the country. "We have to change the trajectory of the war," Rutte said, adding that the West "cannot allow in the 21st century that one country invades another and tries to colonise it".

"We are beyond those days," he said. *—PTI*

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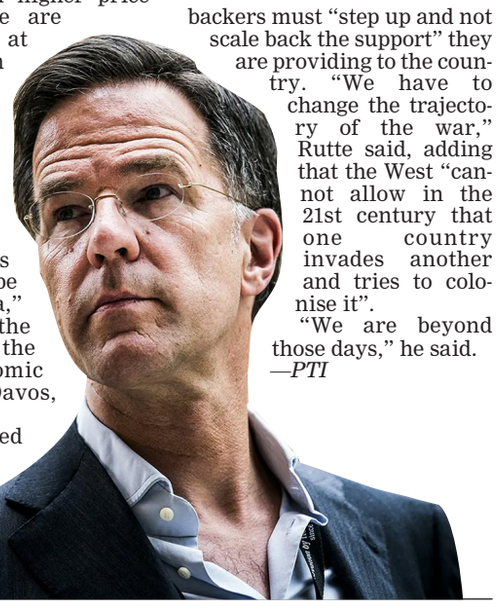


CLASH OF THE TITANS

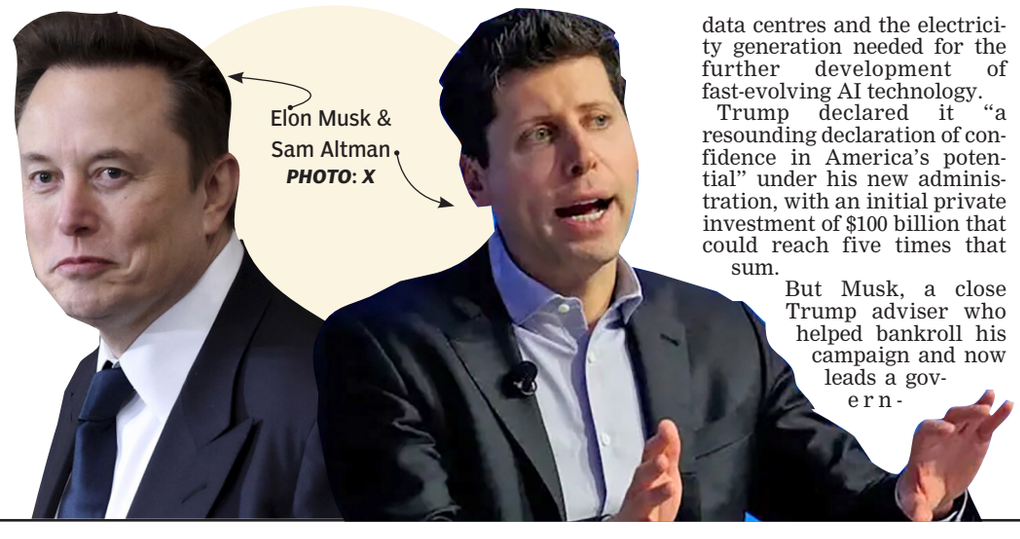
Battle with OpenAI's Altman to test Trump–Musk bond

WASHINGTON, 23 JAN

Elon Musk is clashing with OpenAI CEO Sam Altman over the Stargate Artificial Intelligence infrastructure project touted by President Donald Trump, the latest in a feud between the two tech billionaires that started on OpenAI's board and is now testing Musk's influence with the new president.

Trump on Tuesday had talked up a joint venture investing up to $500B through a new partnership formed by OpenAI, the maker of ChatGPT, alongside Oracle and SoftBank.

The new entity, Stargate, is already starting to build out data centres and the electricity generation needed for the further development of fast-evolving AI technology.



Trump declared it "a resounding declaration of confidence in America's potential" under his new administration, with an initial private investment of $100 billion that could reach five times that sum.

But Musk, a close Trump adviser who helped bankroll his campaign and now leads a government cost-cutting initiative, questioned the value of the investment.

"They don't actually have the money," Musk wrote on his social platform X. "SoftBank has well under $10B secured. I have that on good authority."

Altman responded Wednesday to say Musk was "wrong, as you surely know" and inviting Musk to visit the first site in Texas that is already under construction.

"(T)his is great for the country. i realize what is great for the country isn't always what's optimal for your companies, but in your new role i hope you'll mostly put (America) first," Altman wrote, using a US flag emoji to represent America.

- President Donald Trump on Tuesday had talked up a joint venture investing up to $500B through a new partnership formed by OpenAI, the maker of ChatGPT, alongside Oracle and SoftBank

The public clash over Stargate is part of a years-long dispute between Musk and Altman that began with a boardroom rivalry over who should run OpenAI, which both men helped found. *—PTI*

Apple gets CCPA notice over iPhone issues after update

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

Consumer Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi said on Thursday said the Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) has issued a notice to Apple Inc regarding alleged performance problems with iPhones following the iOS 18+ software update.

"The department, after examining consumer grievances, has issued a notice to Apple through the CCPA, seeking a response on the matter," Joshi said in a social media post.

The notice seeks Apple's explanation regarding reported technical issues with the software update.

The complaints have been received on the National Consumer Helpline regarding the performance issues of iPhones.

The notice marks the latest regulatory scrutiny of the technology giant's operations in India, a key growth market for smartphone manufacturers.

The notice asks Apple to provide a detailed explanation about the technical problems and performance issues reportedly caused by the recent software update.

Apple is expected to respond to the CCPA's notice, offering an explanation for the performance issues and proposing potential solutions.

With the Indian government increasing its scrutiny of tech companies, this move signals that corporations will need to take consumer concerns seriously in India.

Apple has introduced an Apple Store app in India, offering a more personalised shopping experience for customers.

The app is now available to existing Apple users in the country, providing tailored recommendations to streamline the browsing and purchasing process.

This launch is part of Apple's strategy to enhance its presence in India, with a particflar focus on smaller towns and cities to fuel growth.

The app complements the physical flagship stores that opened in Mumbai and New Delhi in 2023. *—Agencies*

Apple has introduced an Apple Store app in India, offering a more personalised shopping experience for customers **PHOTO: X**

Gold hits ₹82,900/10g; silver falls ₹500

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

Gold prices rose Rs 170 to hit a fresh record high of Rs 82,900 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday amid a positive global trend, according to the All India Sarafa Association. The precious metal had closed at Rs 82,730 per 10 grams on Wednesday. In about one year, the precious metal surged Rs 20,180 or 32.17 per cent to Rs 82,900 per 10 grams from Rs 62,720 per 10 grams on 23 February, 2024. Extending the gains for the seventh straight session, gold of 99.5 per cent purity appreciated by Rs 170 to hit an all-time high level of Rs 82,500 per 10 grams. The metal had finished at Rs 82,330 per 10 grams in the previous trading session. Gold of 99.9 and 99.5 per cent purity grew Rs 2,320 each in the last seven trading sessions. *—PTI*

Rupee falls 12 paise to settle at 86.47 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 23 JAN

The rupee declined 12 paise to settle at 86.47 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday amid the strengthening American currency and continuous outflow of foreign funds. However, positive domestic equity markets and lower crude oil prices supported the Indian currency at lower level, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 86.46 and moved between high of 86.38 and low of 86.52 against the greenback during the session. The local unit settled at 86.47 (provisional) against the US dollar, registering a loss of 12 paise from its previous close. On Wednesday, the rupee appreciated 23 paise to close at 86.35 against the dollar. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.07 per cent higher at 108.04 *—PTI*

Amazon Canada shuts down 7 warehouses

TORONTO, 23 JAN

Online retailer Amazon said on Wednesday that it's closing all seven of its warehouses in the Canadian province of Quebec in the next two months. The e-commerce giant said the move would provide "even more savings to our customers over the long run". However, a Canadian union that successfully unionised one warehouse accused the company of closing its sites to fend off organising efforts in the region. The closures will eliminate about 1,700 permanent full-time jobs in the greater Montreal area, Amazon said. The warehouses also employ 250 temporary employees. Amazon said it would enlist local, third-party companies to deliver packages, reverting to a business model it used in Quebec before 2020. Agrait said the decision was made following a "recent review" of the company's operations in the province *—PTI*

Karamtara Engineering files ₹1,750cr IPO papers

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

Power transmission firm Karamtara Engineering has filed preliminary papers with markets regulator Sebi seeking its approval to raise Rs 1,750 crore through an initial public offering (IPO). The proposed IPO is a combination of a fresh issue of shares valued at Rs 1,350 crore and an offer for sale (OFS) of shares worth Rs 400 crore by promoters, according to the Draft Red Herring Prospectus (DRHP) filed on Wednesday. As a part of the OFS, promoters --Tanveer Singh and Rajiv Singh -- are offloading shares worth Rs 200 crore each. Overall, promoters hold 94.8 per cent stake in the company at present. Proceeds of the fresh issue to the tune of Rs 1,050 crore will be used towards payment of debt and a portion will be utilised for general corporate purposes *—PTI*

AWS to invest ₹60Kcr in T'gana data centres

Till now AWS has invested around $1 billion

HYDERABAD, 23 JAN

Amazon Web Services (AWS) has announced plans to invest Rs 60,000 crore to expand its data centre infrastructure in Telangana, according to the state government. Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy and IT and Industries Minister D Sridhar Babu discussed this significant investment with AWS executives during the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

The Telangana government confirmed that the new investment will enhance AWS's existing data centre operations in Hyderabad.

An official press release stated, "AWS will be expanding its data centres in Hyderabad in a big way, with plans for fresh investment of around ₹60,000 crore.

To date, the company has invested approximately USD 1 billion in three operational sites within the state.

AWS has requested additional land allocation from the government to facilitate its expansion, which has been agreed upon. *—PTI*

Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy with Amazon Web Services representative at World Economic Forum in Davos **PHOTO: X**

AWS TO INVEST $8.3B IN M'RASHTRA CLOUD INFRA

AWS has unveiled plans to invest $8.3 billion in cloud infrastructure within the Mumbai region, significantly enhancing India's cloud computing capabilities. This is part of a $12.7 billion commitment for India by 2030, first announced in May 2023. The Maharashtra government and AWS formalised the agreement with a memorandum of understanding at the World Economic Forum in Davos. The initiative is expected to contribute $15.3 billion to India's GDP and create over 81,300 full-time jobs annually in the data centre supply chain, stimulating growth in various sectors. "This collaboration will bolster our technological infrastructure and drive Maharashtra's digital future," stated Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Infosys to create 17,000 new jobs in Hyderabad

HYDERABAD, 23 JAN

Infosys Ltd, India's second-largest IT services firm and Telangana government have agreed to further strengthen their strategic partnership with the expansion of Infosys' IT campus at Pocharam here which will create additional 17,000 jobs.

An official release form the government on Thursday said the announcement was made at the World Economic Forum in Davos following the meeting of Infosys CFO Jayesh Sanghrajka with the IT and Industries Minister of Telangana D Sridhar Babu.

"The expansion plans will create additional 17,000 jobs in the Pocharam Campus where Infosys already employs over 35,000 jobs making it one of their largest in the country. Construction of new IT buildings in phase 1 with investment of Rs 750 crores will be completed in the next 2-3 years that will accommodate 10,000 people," it said. *—PTI*

Naidu discusses health, education with Bill Gates

AMARAVATI, 23 JAN

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu met Microsoft founder Bill Gates at the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, discussing opportunities to transform the state into a global hub for healthcare, education, and innovation. The pair explored the establishment of a centre of excellence for health innovation and diagnostics in Andhra Pradesh. Naidu expressed his enthusiasm for Gates' focus on technology and innovation, emphasising the state's commitment to improving public health outcomes through innovative solutions.

In addition to Gates, Naidu engaged with various corporate leaders, inviting Google Cloud CEO Thomas Kurian to consider Visakhapatnam as a potential chip design and manufacturing centre. He also met Muhammad Taufiq, President of Petronas, urging investment in green ammonia and hydrogen initiatives in an emerging petrochemical hub at Mulapeta. Additionally, he sought assistance from WEF representatives to attract global investments in green energy sectors and establish a clean energy knowledge and skill development centre in Andhra Pradesh. The Chief Minister's engagements underscored the state's ambition to leverage innovative technologies and foster economic growth through strategic partnerships. *—PTI*

Andhra Pradesh CM N Chandrababu with Microsoft founder Bill Gates amid WEF Annual Meeting, in Davos **PHOTO: PTI**

PREMIUM CUSTOMERS FUME

LinkedIn sued for using messages to train AI

CALIFORNIA, 23 JAN

Microsoft's LinkedIn has been sued by Premium customers who said the business-focused social media platform disclosed their private messages to third parties without permission to train generative artificial intelligence models.

According to a proposed class action filed on behalf of millions of LinkedIn Premium customers, LinkedIn quietly introduced a privacy setting last August that let users enable or disable the sharing of their personal data.

Customers said LinkedIn then discreetly updated its privacy policy on 18 September to say data could be used to train AI models, and in a "frequently asked questions" hyperlink said opting out "does not affect training that has already taken place."

This attempt to "cover its tracks" suggests LinkedIn was fully aware it violated customers' privacy and its promise to use personal data only to support and improve its platform, in order to minimize public scrutiny and legal fallout, the complaint said.

The lawsuit was filed in California on behalf of LinkedIn Premium customers who sent or received InMail messages, and whose private information was disclosed to third parties for AI training. It seeks unspecified damages for breach of contract and violations of California's unfair competition law, and $1,000 per person for violations of the federal Stored Communications Act. The lawsuit was filed several hours after US President Donald Trump announced a joint venture among Microsoft-backed OpenAI, Oracle and SoftBank, with a potential USD 500 billion of investment, to build AI infrastructure in the US. *—Arab News*

PHOTO: FB

PHOTO: X

Mkt extends gains for 2nd day on buying in IT stocks

MUMBAI, 23 JAN

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty extended gains for the second session on Thursday due to intense buying in IT, consumer durables and commodity stocks amid a largely positive trend in global markets.

In a volatile trade, the 30-share index rose 115.39 points or 0.15 per cent to settle at 76,520.38. During the session, it climbed 338.55 points or 0.44 per cent to hit a high of 76,743.54. The broader NSE Nifty added 50 points or 0.22 per cent to end at 23,205.35.

From the Sensex pack, UltraTech Cement, Mahindra & Mahindra, Sun Pharmaceutical, Zomato, Tech Mahindra, Tata Steel, Tata Motors, Titan, ITC and Bajaj Finance were the major gainers. Kotak Mahindra Bank, HCL Technologies, PowerGrid, Reliance Industries, State Bank of India, Hindustan Unilever, IndusInd Bank, Nestle India and Axis Bank were among the laggards. *—PTI*

Adani Infra seeks CCI nod for PSP stakes

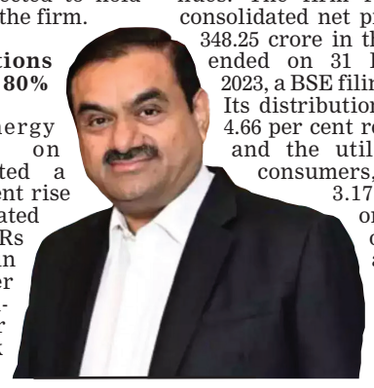
NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

Billionaire Gautam Adani's Adani Infra has applied for clearance from the Competition Commission of India (CCI) to acquire a majority stake in PSP Projects Ltd. Adani Infra, a subsidiary of the flagship Adani Enterprises, aims to enhance its construction capabilities through this move.

PSP Projects at Rs 6,546 crore as of September 2024. Following the initial acquisition and the open offer, both Adani Infra and existing promoters are expected to hold equal shares in the firm.

Adani Solutions profit jumps 80% in Q3

Adani Energy Solutions on Thursday posted a nearly 80 per cent rise in its consolidated net profit to Rs 625.30 crore in the December quarter compared to a year ago on the back of higher revenues. The firm reported a consolidated net profit of Rs 348.25 crore in the quarter ended on 31 December, 2023, a BSE filing showed. Its distribution losses of 4.66 per cent remain low and the utility added consumers, reaching 3.17 million on the back of reliable and affordable power supply. *—PTI*



Zomato, Swiggy face NRAI heat over pvt labels

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

The National Restaurant Association of India (NRAI), representing around half a million eateries across the country, has announced plans to approach the Competition Commission of India (CCI) regarding the "private labelling" activities of food delivery giants Zomato and Swiggy. This move follows their recent ventures into quick commerce food delivery through 'Bistro by Blinkit' and 'Snacc'.

In a statement to PTI, NRAI President Sagar Daryani expressed serious concerns over what he labelled as "anti-competitive" practices, including "data masking" and "deep discounting". He indicated that the NRAI would be augmenting its existing petition to the CCI, citing allegations from member restaurants about Zomato and Swiggy's sourcing from third-party commercial kitchens for their services, Zomato Everyday and Swiggy Daily.

Daryani mentioned that the alarming trend has led to many restaurants shutting down, resulting in job losses. He urged industry stakeholders to consider alternative delivery platforms, citing the promising results of the Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC) pilot programme in Bengaluru, where 20 per cent of orders now come through this channel. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

SHORTAGE OF TALENT

Employers brace for slower hiring in March

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

Indian employers are bracing for cautious hiring in the first quarter of 2025, as ongoing talent shortages continue to impede recruitment efforts, a recent survey reveals. The ManpowerGroup Talent Shortage Survey gathered responses from over 3,000 employers across four regions in India.

Despite a hiring demand that ranks as the highest globally at 53 per cent, a staggering 80 per cent of Indian employer's report difficulties in sourcing the right candidates. This trend, which has been prominent since 2022, is significantly above the global average of 74 per cent, which remained unchanged throughout 2024.

The survey indicates that no region in India is safe from these talent shortages, which continue to shape the global labour market. "The persistent talent shortage, with 80 per cent of organisations struggling to fill roles in 2025, underscores the urgent need for collective action," commented Sandeep Gulati, Managing Director of ManpowerGroup India and the Middle East.

Particularly hard-hit are industries such as IT, energy, and utilities, where the demand for specialised skills like data science and IT continues to rise. In response, employers are increasingly offering upskilling and reskilling opportunities to current employees (39 per cent) to reduce recruitment costs through internal mobility. While only 22 per cent of employers favour increasing temporary recruitment, 38 per cent prefer to explore new talent pools, and 29 per cent plan to raise wages to attract talent. Talent shortages are especially pronounced in South India, where 85 per cent of employers report challenges. *—PTI*

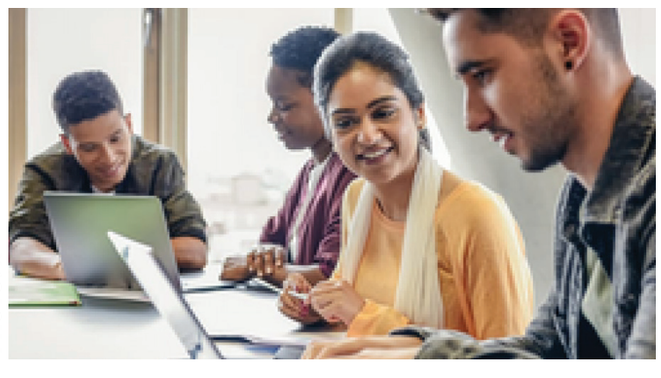


PHOTO: X

Tea growers seek curbs on sub-standard imports

KOLKATA, 23 JAN

Small tea growers (STGs) have urged the Union Commerce Ministry to take steps to curb import of sub-standard crop from countries like Kenya and Nepal and protect the domestic industry.

The Confederation of Indian Small Tea Growers' Association (CISTA), the apex body of STGs, in a letter to Union Commerce minister Piyush Goyal, claimed that more than 53 per cent of the domestic production is contributed by them.

Tea Board has defined STGs as planters whose area of cultivation is within 25 acres and mostly scattered across the tea-growing regions.

According to CISTA, the number of STGs is estimated at three lakh in the country.

The association claimed that between January and October 2024, Kenya Tea Board data revealed that India imported 13.71 millionkg of tea from that country, as compared to 3.53 millionkg in the similar period of 2023. CISTA said that the quality of tea imported from Kenya was cheap and of sub-standard which is often blended and sold within the country and also re-exported under an Indian brand. *—ANI*

PHOTO: PTI

PHOTO: PTI

Mumbai Cricket body bags Guinness Record

MUMBAI, 23 JAN

The Mumbai Cricket Association (MCA) today added another momentous chapter in its remarkable history by becoming the new GUINNESS WORLD RECORDS title holder for the 'Largest Cricket Ball Sentence' as part of their celebration commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai.In a special tribute to the day the cricket journey began at the Wankhede Stadium, the record was created on the anniversary of the stadium's first-ever international match, played in 1975, when India faced West Indies in a memorable Test match from 23 to 29 January.—*PTI*

India to take on Syria in Mandiri U20 Challenge

SIDOAJO, 23 JAN

The India U20 men's team will begin their campaign in the Mandiri U20 Challenge Series, a four-nation friendly tournament, against Syria here on Friday. Head coach Biby Thomas and his 23-member squad of youngsters, consisting mainly of under-17 and under-18 players, arrived in their team hotel in the city of Surabaya on Wednesday and held their first training session in the evening at the Gelora 10 November Stadium.
India will meet Jordan on 27 January and host Indonesia on January 30.The tournament will be a mountain to climb for the Blue Colts, who are the youngest outfit among the four participating teams. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Indo-Canadian wins Bahamas Great Abaco Classic

ABACO CLUB, 23 JAN

Indian-born Canadian Sudarshan Yellamaraju achieved a big career breakthrough, clinching a five-shot victory at the Bahamas Great Abaco Classic here. This is Yellamaraju's maiden win on the Korn Ferry Tour, which is the second rung to the PGA Tour. Another Indian-origin player, Dubai-based Rayhan Thomas, shot a final round of 7-under 65 on Wednesday to finish Tied 7th, his first top-10 on the Korn Ferry Tour. Last week, Thomas was T-27 at the Bahamas Golf Classic. The 23-year-old southpaw, Yellamaraju, who was born in Visakhapatnam before moving to Canada at the age of four, fired a closing 8-under 64, highlighted by eight birdies.—*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Man City sign Omar Marmoush from Eintracht Frankfurt

MANCHESTE, 23 JAN

Manchester City have signed Egyptian striker Omar Marmoush from Eintracht Frankfurt on a four-and-a-half-year deal which will keep him at the club until the summer of 2029, the Premier League side announced on Thursday. The 25-year-old is one of the most coveted young forwards operating in the European scene. He is also capable of being deployed on either attacking flank. An accomplished Egyptian international with 35 caps to his name to date, Marmoush made his professional bow back in his Egyptian homeland as a 17-year-old in 2016 with Wadi Degla.—*PTI*

Gill flops as Karnataka bundle out Punjab for 55

India's batting stars disappoint on Ranji return

BENGALURU, 23 JAN

Ravichandran Smaran's patient fifty and pacers' outstanding effort overshadowed Shubman Gill's modest outing, an 8-ball 4, as Karnataka seized total control of their Ranji Trophy Elite Group C match against Punjab here on Thursday.

Skipper Gill's poor effort had a cascading effect on Punjab's innings as they crumbled for a paltry 55 in their first essay. Smaran, who used all his technical nous, then made an unbeaten 83 (100b, 12x4s, 1×6) as Karnataka reached 199 for 4 when stumps were drawn on Day 1. The home side now lead by 144 runs, and that cushion was the result of the remarkable spells by the pace troika of Vasuki Koushik (11-4-16-4), Abhilash Shetty (9-4-19-3) and Prasidh Krishna (8-3-11-2). There was not a moment of respite for the Punjab batters on a lively pitch that offered appreciable pace and carry. But Karnataka batters, particularly Smaran, negotiated the conditions far better than their opponents to drive their side to command.Skipper Ankit Kumar made 57 but the rest of the Haryana batters succumbed to pacer Suraj

Ravichandran PHOTO: PTI

Sindhu Jaiswal (6/46) as Bengal gained a significant upper hand in their match on day one. Bengal reached 10 for 1 at close and needed 148 runs to gain the important first-innings lead.Middle-order batter Ayush Loharuka made a gritty 101 (227b, 13x4s, 1×6) as Bihar reached a competitive 248 all out against Uttar Pradesh at the of Day 1.

He had good support from Sharman Nigrodh (44) and Sachin Kumar (38).For UP, pacer Shivam Mavi was the lead bowler taking four wickets.In their first innings, UP made 4 for no loss in one over.

At Bengaluru:

Punjab: 55 all out in 29 overs (V Koushik 4/16, Abhilash Shetty 3/19, Prasidh Krishna 2/11) vs Karnataka: 199/4 in 50 overs (R Smaran 83 not out, KV Aneesh 33; Mayank Markande 1/6) —*PTI*

Rohit Sharma flops on domestic comeback

MUMBAI, 23 JAN

India skipper Rohit Sharma's poor form in red-ball cricket continued as he fell for a 19-ball 3 before Mumbai conceded a first-innings lead against Jammu and Kashmir in their Elite Group A match in the Ranji Trophy here on Thursday. Electing to bat on a green-top wicket proved costly for the Ajinkya Rahane-led side as Mumbai were shot out for a mere 120, and in reply, J&K finished the opening day's play at 174/7 for a lead of 54 runs. As many as 17 wickets fell in the day's play.Shardul Thakur saved Mumbai some blushes as his 57-ball 51 with five fours and two sixes dragged them from a perilous 47/7 past the 100-run mark.Making his first appearance in the competition after nearly a decade, Rohit's much-anticipated presence turned out to be a disappointing affair as he perished on another ordinary sho,t and even the crowd turnout, anticipated to be big given the occasion, was not huge.The delivery from J&K's Umar Nazir (4/41) seemed to have surprised the India skipper who ended up lobbing an easy grab for Paras Dogra at mid-off shortly after his India Test opening partner Yashasvi Jaiswal was trapped leg before for a mere 4.Rohit looked to work the ball on the leg side but got a top edge. —*PTI*

AUSTRALIAN OPEN 2025

Aryna, Keys to face off in title clash

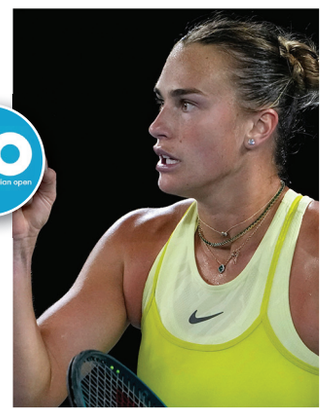
MELBOURNE, 23 JAN

Belarusian tennis professional Aryna Sabalenka and the American Madison Keys progressed to the Australian Open final. Sabalenka emerged triumphant against Paula Badosa in straight sets while Madison Keys made a remarkable in the match after going down in the first set to beat second seed Iga Swiatek in the second semifinal.It took the world no. 1 an hour and 26 minutes to win the match 6-4, 6-2 on Centre Court. Sabalenka is now one win away from making a hat-trick of titles at Melbourne Park.

Martina Hingis made the hat-trick last time when she won the title from 1997 to 1999 and Sabalenka, who has been unbeaten for 11 matches in 2025, has a great chance to equal 26-year-old record. Sabalenka also became the first woman to reach three back-to-back Australian Open finals since Serena Williams achieved the landmark from 2015 to 2017.

Keys topples Swiatek to set up final against Sabalenka

Madison Keys fought back from a set down on Thursday to shock Iga Swiatek in a nail-biter and set up an Australian Open final against two-time defending champion Aryna Sabalenka.



Aryna Sabalenka PHOTO: X

The 19th seed battled through a thrilling semi-final on a final-set tiebreak against the world number two 5-7, 6-1, 7-6 (10/8) after Sabalenka swept aside Paula Badosa in straight sets.

Five-time Grand Slam champion Swiatek had not dropped her serve since the first round but was broken eight times by Keys.

U19 WC: India outclass Sri Lanka by 60 runs, enter Super 6

India outclass SL by 60 runs, enter Super 6 PHOTO: X/ @BCCI

KUALA LUMPUR, 23 JAN

Opener G Trisha's composed 49 and pacers' excellent new ball spell fashioned India's lopsided 60-run win over Sri Lanka and their entry into the Super Six of the ICC U19 T20 Women's World Cup as Group A toppers here on Thursday.

On a spiteful pitch, Trisha's 44-ball knock (5x4, 1x6) was worth its weight in gold as it guided India to a competitive 118 for nine.

Pacers VJ Joshitha and Shabnam then tore through the Lankan top-order to reduce them to 9 for four in 3.2 overs, and run out of skipper Manudi Nanayakkara an over later had them reeling at 12 for five.

Sri Lanka was eventually restricted to 58 for nine in 20 overs as India finished the group engagements with an all-win record in three matches.

There was not much life left in Sri Lanka's chase once the spinners were introduced, and India's assortment of left-arm orthodox tweakers did the mopping-up job to perfection.

Rashmika Sewwandi (15, 12b, 2x4) looked in good touch for the while she lasted, but the mounting asking rate forced her to take chances against Parunika Sisodia and got caught in the deep.

It was also the only double-digit score in the Lankan innings.

Sisodia (2/7) was the pick among spinners as she and her colleagues Ayushi Shukla and Vaishnavi Sharma, who picked up stunning figures of 5/5 against Malaysia in the previous match, dismantled the lower order without much ado.

Earlier, India's batting too went through stormy seas but Player of the Match Trisha held together the defending champions with exemplary maturity. —*PTI*

HIGHEST-RANKED

Gukesh becomes 4th in latest FIDE rankings

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

Continuing his rapid rise, world champion D Gukesh dethroned compatriot Arjun Erigiasi to become the highest-ranked Indian chess player, at fourth, in the latest FIDE rankings on Thursday.

Gukesh, 18, achieved the feat when he logged his second victory in the Tata Steel Tournament in Wijk Aan Zee (Netherlands) defeating Vincent Keymer of Germany.

Gukesh, who was awarded the Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna recently, has amassed 2784 rating points, while Erigaisi, who was the highest-ranked Indian for a long time, has slipped to fifth with 2779.5 rating points.

Norway's Magnus Carlsen continues to be the undisputed world No.1 with 2832.5 points, followed by United States Grandmaster Hikaru Nakamura (2802) and country-mate Fabiano Caruana (2798). Gukesh has been in sublime form ever since he beat China's Ding Liren to clinch the world title in Singapore in December last year. He took a break from the game to attend functions and festivities back home and skipped the World Rapid and Blitz Championship in New York. On his return to the board, Gukesh has not lost a single game in Wijk Aan Zee. He has two victories and three draws so far in the tournament with eight rounds still to go. —*PTI*

GUKESH OVERTAKES ARJUN TO BE NEW INDIA NO. 1

World champion D. Gukesh delivered a technically brilliant performance to defeat Germany's Vincent Keymer, taking his score to 3.5 points at the end of the fifth round of the Tata Steel Chess tournament. This second victory propelled Gukesh to fourth place in the live ratings, moving ahead of compatriot Arjun Erigaisi, who settled for a draw against Leon Luke Mendonca. With eight rounds remaining in the tournament, the first rest day is set for Friday. Gukesh now has two victories and three draws, placing him just behind R. Praggnanandhaa and Abdusattorov Nodirbek of Uzbekistan. —PTI

PSG comeback floors City as Arsenal near CL last 16

LONDON, 23 JAN

Paris Saint-Germain pushed Manchester City to the brink of Champions League elimination after coming from two goals down to win 4-2 on Wednesday, while Arsenal all but secured their place in the last 16. Holders Real Madrid remain in contention for a top-eight spot after sweeping aside Red Bull Salzburg 5-1, but Bayern Munich's hopes of automatic qualification took a hit with a 3-0 defeat by Feyenoord. Pep's City were left stunned as they blew a two-goal lead after Jack Grealish and Erling Haaland struck early in the second half in pouring rain at the Parc des Princes. Substitute Ousmane soon halved the deficit for PSG and Bradley equalized on the hour after Desire Doue's effort came back off the crossbar. Joao Neves' diving header put PSG on top before Goncalo Ramos added a late fourth as the French champions climbed to 26th in the table.—*PTI*

Lakshya Sen bows out of Indonesia Masters

JAKARTA, 23 JAN

Star India shuttler Lakshya Sen extended his struggling run on the international circuit with a loss in the second round of the Indonesia Masters Super 500 badminton tournament here on Thursday.

The 10th-ranked Indian went down against Japan's Kenta Nishimoto 16-21 21-12 21-23.

Earlier in the day, the mixed doubles pair of Dhruv Kapila and Tanisha Crasto squandered an early lead to go down 21-18 15-21 19-21 against Malaysia's Pang Ron Hoo and Su Yin Cheng in the second round. Sen, an Asian Games silver medallist, and Commonwealth Games gold winner, made a poor start to the match as he lost the first game.

Lakshya Sen PHOTO: BAI MEDIA

The Indian's famed defense was ably tackled by the lower-ranked Nishimoto as he took a 9-3 lead and never looked back, despite Sen trying to make a comeback at 10-11. But Nishimoto employed fast rallies and closed out the first game comfortably.

Sen made a fast start to the second game and raced to a 6-3 lead with an aggressive smash.

Nishimoto opted for long rallies to tire out Sen but the Indian's smart strokeplay handed him a 11-6 lead at the break. Nishimoto then committed plenty of errors at the net as Sen's retrieving capacity was on full display to extend his lead to 16-8. The Japanese were troubled by the drift as Sen picked up points at will to close out the second game at 21-12 and force the match into the decider. With the change of sides, it was then Sen's turn to struggle as Nishimoto raced to a 5-1 lead in the decider.

But a calm and composed Sen kept up up with his opponent till 7-7.

Sen took the lead for the first time in the decider with a jump smash but committed errors due to the drift to trail 9-11 at the final break of the tie and never really got his footing into the match. —*PTI*

10-YR-OLD WONDER

Atiqa is 1st Indian at World Series Karting

MURO LECCESSE, 23 JAN

India's 10-year-old karting sensation Atiqa Mir is set to become the first female from the country to race in the World Series Karting (WSK) Championships after being signed by 29-time champions Babyrace for a full season.

This was after her impressive results in a test session conducted at the La Conca circuit in south Italy. The racer from Jammu and Kashmir will also be the only female in the Mini class having a highly competitive grid of over 60 karts.

She will race in all three WSK Championships this year: the WSK Super Master Series, the WSK Euro Series, and the WSK Final Cup as a debutant.

The first of these three races, the WSK Super Series Master Series, will be held over the weekend.

"I am super thrilled to get this opportunity to drive within WSK with Babyrace. This will be the highest level of karting I have ever driven in. I will have to learn a lot of circuits and driving in the winter will be a challenge but I am up for it," said Atiqa.

WSK is considered the pinnacle of karting which attracts the best driving talent, the top kart manufacturers, and engine manufacturers from the world over.

Reigning world champion Max Verstappen is among the host of drivers who have raced in WSK in their formative years.

Like Verstappen, Atiqa too hails from a racing family. Her father Asif Nazir is India's first National Karting Champion and Formula Asia Vice Champion.

He will be by Atiqa's side when she competes in Italy this weekend.

"Atiqa has managed to move up to the highest level of karting through her hard work and dedication.

"It will be tough for her racing against this quality of the field. She has to learn new tracks, and new conditions and adapt herself to this new environment. It will be challenging and a learning year for her," said Nazir. —*PTI*

Formula E gets a 'pit boost' for Season 11

LONDON, 23 JAN

PHOTO: X

The FIA Formula E World Championship on Thursday introduced a "pit boost" for select races throughout season 11.

The mid-race feature will debut in the Jeddah E-Prix on February 14-15. "Pit Boost will challenge teams to weigh the benefits of an energy boost against the risk of losing track position, introducing new high-stakes strategic elements and enhancing race unpredictability," said Formula E.

The feature in the all-electric racing series will provide a 10% energy increase (3.85kWh) to race cars through a 30-second, 600kW rapid-energy boost in the pitlane.

"This mandatory sporting feature deploying significantly more power than current consumer superchargers adds another strategic element during selected races, with the potential to dramatically alter race outcomes and tactics," the statement added.

Formula E previously used the Fanboost overtaking feature from 2014 to 2022. "PIT BOOST will challenge teams and drivers alike to make high-stakes decisions under intense pressure. —*PTI*